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**PORTRAITURE AND HOMOEROTIC DESIRE
IN *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY***

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ABSTRACT

Veera Rajala: Portraiture and Homoerotic Desire in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*
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The aim of this study is to analyze the connection between portraiture and sexuality in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), and how these elements, along with many other themes in the novel, create a multi-layered story. More specifically, the focus will be on how the written and the "visual" are interconnected, how they differ from each other in the story and what these discrepancies might signify. This study demonstrates that Wilde employs multiple levels of meaning to indirectly discuss forbidden topics, as well as themes of appearance and reality, and the portrait acts as a literary device through which sexuality can be discussed indirectly. Wilde has become a central figure within the world of gay literature over the years, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* has remained relevant to this day. Wilde's own life, I think, is interesting in terms of analyzing this novel, since many connections have been drawn between them, and many of the novel's themes are also important and present in Wilde's life. In this case we cannot truly separate the artist from the art and therefore I briefly cover the author's own life story and give attention to how the novel's themes link with his own experiences.

I examine the novel's symbolism, which is mainly constructed around the verbal portrait (the verbal descriptions of a visual work of art), and how the symbolic portrait is utilized within the story. I examine portraiture as a form of art and the features that are innate to it, as well as themes of physiognomy and how they can be seen in Wilde's book. I believe that portraiture and physiognomy are closely interconnected due to their shared characteristics, and they are also compatible with themes of identity and sexuality. I will also be focusing on themes of beauty, moral goodness, secrecy and seduction, since they are prevalent in the story and can be connected to Dorian's portrait and the aspects of identity and sexuality in the novel. There is a clear divide between the inner and outer life of Dorian's character and dualism surrounding his portrait and character (the soul/body, art/life). I will approach these topics through textual analysis of the novel, combined with theory about portraiture and the Victorian science of physiognomy, as well as secondary sources on *Dorian Gray*. I will compare relevant materials and use previous studies on Wilde and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to support my claims and analysis.

My study demonstrates that homosexuality is mostly muted in the written text, and most of what we know or can guess is told to us through the portrait. There is a current of homoeroticism throughout the whole novel and it is mostly linked to Dorian's character and portrait. Male beauty and desire are at the center of the story, and women do not seem to have a place in the erotic scheme of the novel. Dorian's picture is a representation of this desire between men, as well as his new (sexual) identity that is built between Lord Henry and Basil's influence. Beauty and visuality are strongly related to the homoeroticism, seduction and influence in the story. The differences between the public and private, as well as the inner and outer aspects of Dorian's character symbolize the double life that many homosexuals, even Wilde himself, were forced to live and the struggles that they had to endure during the Victorian era.

Key words: portraiture, sexuality, physiognomy, Victorian England, Oscar Wilde

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Veera Rajala: Portraiture and Homoerotic Desire in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

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Tutkielmani tarkoituksena on analysoida muotokuvamaalauksen ja seksuaalisuuden yhteyttä Oscar Wilden kirjassa *Dorian Grayn muotokuva* (1891) sekä tutkia kuinka nämä elementit yhdessä muiden teemojen kanssa luovat kirjan monikerroksisen tarinan. Erityisesti keskityn siihen, miten sanallinen ja "visuaalinen" ovat yhteydessä toisiinsa, miten ne eroavat toisistaan ja mitä nämä erot saattavat merkitä. Tämä tutkielma osoittaa, että Wilde käyttää hyväkseen monikerroksista kerronnan muotoa käsitelläkseen kiellettyjä aiheita sekä ulkoisen vaikutelman ja todellisuuden teemoja. Muotokuva toimii kerronnallisena välineenä, jonka kautta seksuaalisuudesta voidaan keskustella epäsuorasti. Wildestä on tullut keskeinen hahmo homokirjallisuuden maailmassa ja *Dorian Grayn muotokuva* on säilyttänyt asemansa tärkeänä teoksena tähän päivään asti. Wilden oma elämä on mielestäni myös kiinnostava tämän kirjan analyysin kannalta, sillä monet kirjan teemoista ovat tärkeitä ja läsnä myös Wilden elämässä. Tässä tapauksessa ei voida täysin erottaa tekijää ja teosta toisistaan, ja siksi käsittelen lyhyesti myös kirjailijan omaa elämäntarinaa ja sitä, kuinka kirjan teemat ovat yhteydessä hänen omiin kokemuksiinsa.

Tarkastelen kirjan symboliikkaa, joka rakentuu pääasiassa verbaalisen muotokuvan ympärille, ja tapoja, joilla tätä muotokuvaa on käytetty hyväksi tarinan kerronnassa. Tarkastelen muotokuvamaalauksen taiteenlajina, sen ominaisia piirteitä sekä fysiionoman teemoja ja miten ne näkyvät Wilden kirjassa. Uskon, että muotokuvamaalaus ja fysiionomia voidaan niiden jaettujen piirteidensä puolesta liittää toisiinsa, ja niiden avulla voidaan tarkastella myös identiteetin ja seksuaalisuuden teemoja. Lisäksi keskityn kauneuden, moraalisen hyvyyden, salailun ja viettelyksen teemoihin, sillä ne ovat tarinassa keskeisessä osassa ja ne voidaan liittää Dorianin muotokuvaan sekä seksuaalisuuden ja identiteetin näkökulmaan. Tarinassa on selvä jako Dorianin sisäisen ja ulkoisen elämän välillä ja kaksijakoisuutta hänen muotokuvaansa ja hahmoonsa liittyen (sielu/keho, taide/elämä). Lähestyn näitä aiheita tekstimuotoisen analyysin avulla, hyödyntäen teoriaa muotokuvamaalauksesta ja viktoriaanisesta fysiionoman tieteestä sekä sekundäärilähteitä, jotka käsittelevät *Dorian Gray*-teosta. Vertaan oleellisia materiaaleja ja käytän aiempia tutkimuksia, joiden aiheena on Wilde ja *Dorian Grayn muotokuva*, tukemassa analyysiäni ja argumenttejäni.

Tutkielmani demonstroi, että homoseksuaalisuus on enimmäkseen vaiennettu kirjoitetussa tekstissä ja suurin osa siitä, mitä tiedämme tai voimme päätellä, on kerrottu meille muotokuvan kautta. Homoeroottisuus kulkee koko romaanin läpi ja se on vahvasti yhteydessä Dorianin hahmoon ja muotokuvaan. Mieskauneus ja miesten välinen himo ovat tarinan keskiössä, eikä naisilla näytä juuri olevan paikkaa tarinan eroottisessa rakenteessa. Dorianin kuva edustaa tätä miesten välistä himoa sekä hänen uutta (seksuaalista) identiteettiään, joka on rakentunut Lord Henryn ja Basilin vaikutusten välillä. Kauneus ja visuaalisuus liittyvät vahvasti tarinan homoeroottisuuteen, houkuttukseen ja vaikutusvaltaan. Dorianin hahmon julkisen ja yksityisen, sekä sisäisen ja ulkoisen minän erot symboloivat kaksoiselämää, jota monet homoseksuaalit, jopa Wilde itse, joutuivat elämään ja vaikeuksia, joita he joutuivat kohtaamaan viktoriaanisena aikana.

Avainsanat: muotokuvat, seksuaalisuus, fysiionomia, viktoriaaninen Englanti, Oscar Wilde

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1. INTRODUCTION

Before the invention of photography, portraits were the only way to capture and record the appearance of a person. However, portraits have always been thought to have a much greater function than just capturing a person's face and appearance. They have also been used to show the sitter's status, power, virtue, wealth and beauty, among many other things (Pointon, 3,15). Very closely connected to a person's identity, whether it is depicting their personality and personal characteristics, occupation, or their place in society and the world, a commonly expressed notion about portraits is that they have the ability to show the true identity of the people depicted within them (Christensen, 161).

Considering this, the connection between portraiture and sexuality is not a difficult one to make, since portraits are inherently connected to the expression of personal identity, and "thinking and writing about sexuality have long involved thinking and writing about art" (Glavey, 9). Portraiture and writing about fictional portraits can provide a platform for addressing a topic that could not be otherwise addressed. Portraits, generally, also have the ability to challenge social and cultural norms and perceptions of identity, for example, by representing people who have been traditionally marginalized or excluded completely from cultural narratives, or by placing the subject in a different setting or context than what we would expect. In a similar way, Wilde uses portraiture and the silent mode of representation that it provides to discuss homosexuality, which was otherwise silenced in late-Victorian discourses, and give a voice to a group of people that was marginalized.

Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was published in 1891 and has often been considered one of the first and most widely known queer novels of modern times, and Wilde has become known as a key figure within gay criticism over the years (Raby, xv). In the form in which it was first submitted for publication, Wilde's novel was perhaps one of the most explicit representations of homoerotic desire in English literature up to that time (Frankel, 56). The novel was part of the emerging artistic and cultural movement of Aestheticism, which emphasized beauty, form and sensory experiences, as opposed to moralizing messages. For many, Aestheticism, homoeroticism and effeminacy came to mean the same thing, or at least they were strongly associated with each other (Wilper, 138). The reason for this might have been that Aestheticism was often believed to have "claimed authority over traditionally female realms" (Schaffer, 40). A significant part of the Aesthetic movement was also its rejection of traditional moral and social values, which we can see in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as an absence of Victorian values.

The late Victorian era was dominated by a strict moral code and emphasis on social conformity. It was defined by puritanism and heteronormativity (Adut, 214), and the institution of marriage and family values were important (Gagnier, 18). Instead, in *Dorian Gray*, we see morally gray characters and hints at a more “deviant” sort of sexuality that would have normally been denounced in a Victorian society.

In this study, I will examine the role of portraiture in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, how it is used in a symbolic way, and how it is tied to identity, sexuality and homoeroticism. Dorian’s portrait will be shown as a key part of the homosexual coding in the novel, as well as of the feelings of shame and guilt surrounding homosexuality, especially in a society that deems it unnatural and even criminal. During the Victorian age homosexuality was widely condemned and the prevailing social attitudes viewed it as sinful and immoral. There were laws in place, specifically The Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885, that deemed all homosexual acts – whether public or private – illegal and criminalized “gross indecency” between men (Wilper, 19). The enactment of these laws suppressing homosexuality forced many homosexuals to be silenced and hide parts of their lives as they feared public disgrace and imprisonment. Thus, while homoerotic desire must be muted in the written story, the literary portrait provides Wilde with a structure for representing male desire and displacing the eroticism onto the “visual” symbol in the text. With the portrait in the center of the novel’s events, Wilde is able to discuss a multitude of different ideas in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Themes of identity, sexuality, beauty, moral goodness and seduction are all tied to the portrait and have a significant role in the story. My study will touch on all of these topics, but the focus will be on the ways in which the text alludes to male same-sex desire and resists the dominant heterosexual ideologies in Victorian Britain. I will also be examining the text through the lens of physiognomy, which is strongly related to beauty and the goodness of a person. I argue that the notions of portraiture, physiognomy and identity are all compatible; portraiture and physiognomy are both interested in the outer appearance and the inner reality and identity of a person. There is also a noticeable difference in the novel between the written story and the visual portrait of Dorian, as well as the real character of Dorian and his portrait. I will be looking at how the ekphrastic descriptions of the portrait and the narrative about Dorian’s life and character differ from one another, and what it might suggest to the reader.

2. OSCAR WILDE

Oscar Wilde, born in 1854 in Ireland, was a writer, poet and playwright. He was known for his wit, charm and extravagant lifestyle, which often put him at odds with the conservative values of the Victorian society. While he attended Oxford, he was introduced to a lot of the ideologies that would be guiding his works in the years to come (Calloway, 35). Wilde was especially fascinated by Aestheticism, Hellenism and hedonism, the pursuit of pleasure, and he became known, and even celebrated, for his seemingly lavish lifestyle, clothes and interior design. Wilde led a life where beauty and new sensations seemed to take the forefront, and he was readily influenced by other written works and found a lot of his ideals in old and modern literature. This influence carried on to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, in which Lord Henry's "new Hedonism", the philosophy of exquisite sensation and beauty, resembles the philosophy of the aesthetes, especially Walter Pater, whose book *The History of the Renaissance* Wilde mentioned as one of the books that influenced his life a lot in his younger years (Friedman, 2). In his book, Pater encouraged his readers to embrace the notion of "art for art's sake", and to write and create without the ever-increasing burden of the Victorian morals and artistic conventions (Calloway, 37). His imperative was also to live one's life as a work of art, i.e. surround yourself with beauty and experience life. Later in his life, when Wilde had gotten married and was falling in with the social patters of the time, he encountered Hyusman's *À Rebours*, the book that was evidently also featured in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as the yellow book that Lord Henry gifts Dorian in Chapter 10, that had a similar effect on him (Ellmann, 238). Ellmann has noted that both *À Rebours* and the Wilde's yellow book are similar in the way that they share a sense for decadence and grandeur, art and non-heteronormative views of sexuality (237).

Comparable themes can also be found in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The novel can, in fact, in many ways be seen as a parallel to Wilde's own life and it has often been regarded as a partially autobiographical work. Wilde himself has drawn connections between the characters and facets of his own life and personality. According to Ellmann's report, "Wilde saw the three characters as reflections of his own image. He explained to a correspondent, 'Basil Hallward is what I think I am: Lord Henry what the world thinks of me: Dorian is what I would like to be in other ages, perhaps.'" (301). It also includes many themes that were present in Wilde's life at the time that he wrote the novel, most importantly his exploration of same-sex relationships. Ellman writes that Wilde was simultaneously "occupying himself with two impulses, one associative and the other deviant" (239). Much like Dorian Gray, Wilde was involved in a scandalous relationship that ultimately led to his downfall and to him being convicted of homosexuality and sentenced for "gross indecency".

The three trials of Oscar Wilde caused one of the biggest scandals of his time, and later came to “represent an important moment in the history of male homosexuality” (Schulz, 37). Wilde’s legal battles were a cultural phenomenon that brought homosexuality into public discourse (Wilper, 143), and solidified a distinct homosexual identity and the model for a homosexual figure (Schulz, 37). This model was “distinguished by effeminacy, dandyism, aestheticism, and was embodied in Oscar Wilde” (Wilper, 140). While Wilde’s homosexual activities became the main focus of the trials, putting him at odds with the Victorian middle classes, they were not the only reason why many disapproved of him. As Schulz observes, he “symbolized a much broader spectrum of perceived decadence and degeneration that to late Victorians threatened cultural collapse as the century drew to a close” (38). Wilde himself denied all the accusations in court, claiming that the relationships he had with all of these young men were something like the Platonic relationships between younger and older men that were common in ancient Greece, and that were purely intellectual in nature (Wilper, 51). In these circumstances where homosexuality was still very much denounced, it is not that surprising that the novel also received a lot of backlash when it was published in 1891 and became notorious as a “poisonous” book (McCormack, 114). Although Wilde had edited out the most explicit references to homosexuality, the readers were not oblivious to the many allusions (Ellmann, 288). Despite being married, Wilde had gathered a reputation for himself over the years and, as Adut notes, even before the court cases, his proclivities were common knowledge in London: “His effeminate public persona fully fit the Victorian stereotype of a homosexual” (227).

Like the portrait in the novel, Wilde’s own life and career were divided between his public persona and his private life and desires. Wilde was known for his strong and elegant public persona and ultimately we know quite little about his private self and his life. Few of Wilde’s biographers have been able to pin down his life and complex character without diluting it with an agenda of their own or their own personal views and feelings (Holland, 5). In the vein of Des Esseintes in *À Rebours*, “he wanted to construct an artistic world in which to live artistically” (Ellman, 294) and he spoke of life as art. Many thought him to be artificial, but he thought of the self as having multiple possibilities, and of his life as manifesting each of these in turn (ibid.). This tension is reflected in the novel’s exploration of the duality of human nature and the struggle between the public and the private self. In many ways, the novel seems to contain themes that were central to Wilde’s own worldview and topics that were present in his own personal life. In Wilde’s case I believe it is fair to say that we cannot really separate the art from the artist.

3. PORTRAIT AS METAPHOR

Portraiture is one of the great defining metaphors in Western culture and literature (Pointon, 23). In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian's portrait acts as a metaphorical device through which Wilde could discuss taboo topics, such as homosexuality, more freely. The portrait and its significance is important to understanding the novel and all of its underlying themes and meanings. While portraits depict the physical appearance of their subjects, portraiture is also thought to be connected to the imagination, memory and the spiritual (Pointon, 23). Many novels that include portraits are interested, as the topic of portraiture suggests, in themes of personal identity, especially sexual, gender or racial aspects of it (Hovey, 1). Lavater believes that "each perfect portrait is an important painting, since it displays the human mind with the peculiarities of personal character," and "[in portraits] we contemplate a being in which understanding, inclinations, sensations, passions, good and bad qualities of mind and heart, are mingled in a manner peculiar to itself" (171-72). According to John Loughery, there are three things a successful portrait should do (on top of rendering a credible likeness): "A portrait should evoke the spirit or inner life of the individual, it should make us urgently desire to know more about the sitter, or it might suggest a wider symbolic connection even as we are pondering a specific individual..." (1). Therefore, a painter of a portrait has to be a storyteller, observer, biographer and a psychologist all at once.

The notion that a portrait might be able to tell the truth about a subject, and reveal things that we would not otherwise know, is very prevalent in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In the novel, the painting becomes a storage for information that only Dorian is aware of and that no other character, or even the reader, knows. Unlike representations that are dependent on language, portraits can offer a broader understanding of a person by emphasizing the physiognomy of the sitter. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, most of the novel's central themes and discussions are constructed around the visual portrait of Dorian. In different stages of its creation and existence, the portrait represents multiple different ideas and simultaneously acts as a symbol of beauty, pleasure, hidden homoerotic feelings, influence, identity and the duality of human nature.

Portraits feature prominently in a number of Wilde's fictions (Frankel, 49), and they often have a function of revealing the truth about a character or their identity in some way. Often they have been a way to indirectly write about same-sex desire, and we come to understand portraiture as simultaneously revealing and concealing identity. Wilde constantly returns to themes of beauty and portraiture in his writings, one of these instances being "The Portrait of Mr. W.H." (1889), a short story that shares many key elements with *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In both of these stories there

is an important portrait that acts as a representation of homosexual desire and brings forth a discussion about sexuality, secrecy and hidden homoerotic feelings. In “The Portrait of Mr. W.H”, “the form of the narrative becomes a series of frames, spiraling down toward the mystery at the center of the painting, the mystery of the existence of homosexual desire between Shakespeare and a boy actor” (Hovey, 41). In both stories, homoerotic desire is connected to art and artistic expression and immortalized in a painting, which can reveal the truth about otherwise mysterious and uncertain circumstances, as well as hidden homoerotic feelings.

Due to its ability to simultaneously conceal and reveal information about a character’s identity, Wilde uses portraiture as a continuing metaphor in *Dorian Gray* and constructs a plot around Dorian’s mysterious painting, which can reveal his true identity to anyone who looks at it, but also contains his secrets and hides them from other characters and the reader. In the same way, portraiture, as a metaphor, can be used to conceal certain things from the reader while still being able to allude to them. The necessity to convert the verbal representation of sexuality into a visual one arises in order to make the novel’s homoeroticism more subtle and ambiguous. The different ways in which Dorian’s painting is connected to sexuality and hidden homoerotic desire are examined in more detail in the following chapter.

4. DORIAN'S PORTRAIT

The portrait that Basil Hallward paints of Dorian Gray in the beginning of the story becomes the centerpiece of the whole novel, in which Dorian's inner conflicts and his true self are physically and symbolically realized. Simultaneously, it is also where other characters' feelings and hidden desires are reflected. Eve Sedgwick describes the plot of *Dorian Gray* as one that "condenses" its homoeroticism: "The novel takes a plot that is distinctively one of male-male desire, the competition between Basil Hallward and Lord Henry Wotton for Dorian Gray's love, and condenses it into the plot of the mysterious bond of figural likeness and figural expiation between Dorian Gray and his own portrait" (160). The portrait alters in accordance with all the immoral things that Dorian does throughout the novel and becomes "a visible symbol of the degradation of sin" (112). The name of the novel can be interpreted as having a double meaning: on one level, it refers to the visual portrait of Dorian Gray that Basil paints, which initially captures his youth and beauty, and becomes ruined as the story progresses. And, on another level, there is the verbal portrait of Dorian, which is created through written narrative, and which depicts his life after the completion of the portrait, how he essentially transforms from a blank canvas to the version of himself that he is at the end of the story. Like a portrait painter, the narrator of the novel places Dorian inside these figurative frames and paints his picture with meticulous attention to the details of his appearance.

Dorian's painting, like literary paintings generally do, gives a more dynamic quality to an otherwise static medium. Eric S. Rabkin writes, "One expectation normally held about an oil painting, as we are told on the first page of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, is 'that it is necessarily immobile'. Conversely, the characters within a narrative world seem inherently mobile. This suggests an implacable ontological contrast between the stable world of visual portraiture and the mobile world of verbal portraiture" (94). One of the elements of ekphrasis, the written description of visual art, is that ekphrasis is capable of creating a "framed narrative" and giving life to a painting that has typically been seen as a stagnant mode of representation. Basil's painting of Dorian is already more mobile than most paintings, it lives a life of its own and physically changes when no one is looking. But besides the obvious mobility, the text and the portrait together create a narrative of Dorian's life and his changing identity. On the one hand it shows an unmoving picture of Dorian in different stages of his life, but on the other hand Wilde's descriptions of the painting tells us a story of Dorian from his innocent boyhood to his corrupted adulthood. The painting is barely visible in the story, but it works like magic in the background and arches over the whole

storyline. The written story and the portrait become one as Dorian's every action appears visually on the painting: "the cruel grin" of the mouth after he breaks off his engagement with Sibyl and causes her to take her own life, the blood on his hands after the murders Basil Hallward, and of course the wrinkles that show the effect of the years passing by.

Male beauty and desire are clearly at the center of this story. Throughout the novel, there is an interest in masculine beauty, pleasure and seduction. The novel puts a lot of emphasis on male beauty (inner and outer) while talking about women in a more unfavorable manner. These kinds of negative, overtly sexist views on women are mainly expressed by Lord Henry, who clearly sees women as inferior to men. He often shares his views with Dorian and tells him, for example, that "no woman is a genius", "women are a decorative sex" and "they never have anything to say" (58). He also tries to convince Dorian that he was not wrong for all the cruel things he said to Sibyl because, "Women appreciate cruelty, downright cruelty, more than anything else. They have wonderfully primitive instincts. We have emancipated them, but they remain slaves looking for their masters, all the same. They love being dominated" (120). The men in the story have a high estimation of Dorian's beauty, which is generally often seen as a feminine quality, and there are many specific and detailed descriptions of Dorian's appearance. Moreover, his beauty is often described in terms that reflect the femininity and feminine qualities of his appearance. For example, he is described as a "young Adonis, who looks as if he was made out of ivory and rose-leaves" (9) and as "handsome" with his "finely curved scarlet lips, his frank blue eyes, his crisp gold hair" (23). In this way, the novel rules out women as objects of admiration or desire and places Dorian at the center of the erotic scheme instead. The novel focuses on the ways in which men admire and desire one another, and women are completely excluded from this picture.

The novel opens with a scene in which Basil Hallward and his friend Lord Henry are having a discussion about Basil's latest painting of Dorian Gray. Basil recalls his first time meeting Dorian, and how he immediately became the object of Basil's adoration: "I knew that had met someone whose mere personality was so fascinating that [...] it would absorb my whole nature, my whole soul, my very art itself" (13). Henry encourages Basil to submit the picture to an academy, but Basil refuses, claiming that he has "put too much of himself into it" (9) and in it, he has shown "the secrets of his soul" (12). He fears that upon looking at the picture people might be able to detect his deep feelings for Dorian that go beyond mere appreciation for his physical beauty. Already, the portrait is connected not only to Basil's hidden feelings towards Dorian, but to feelings of shame around his desire towards someone of the same sex. The picture is a visual representation of Basil's feelings for Dorian, and Basil wants to keep it all to himself so as to protect Dorian and his own

secret from the world's "shallow prying eyes" (18). In general, painting and portraiture correspond to an impossible homosexual desire in the novel. Basil affectively translates his sexually charged desire into an artistic creation, and that way he is able to have Dorian to himself in the form of his art.

Basil wishes that Henry would not meet Dorian because he knows that Henry will ruin Dorian's purity and innocence, but Lord Henry ignores his wish. After Lord Henry meets Dorian for the first time, he immediately starts to extend his influence over him with his speeches and theories on life, his hedonistic lifestyle and his different ideologies. He teaches Dorian about experiencing all worldly pleasures and following one's inner impulses. He tells Dorian, "you have had passions that made you afraid, thoughts that have filled you with terror, day-dreams and sleeping dreams whose mere memory might stain your cheeks with shame" (26). Dorian is bewildered by his words but at once he realizes things from his boyhood, things that had never been touched before. Dorian is fascinated by his words and can instantly feel himself changing. During these moments of realization, Basil is painting Dorian onto the canvas, capturing a whole new side of him, and a look on his face "that he had never seen there before" (25). In this moment, the portrait becomes a material formalization, a visual representation, of the complex erotic influence (Craft, 123). During the creation of the portrait, homosexual desire and seduction is permanently enclosed within the painting in two ways: firstly, through Lord Henry's seduction of Dorian and Dorian's physical reaction to it, and secondly, through Basil's own desire for Dorian which is inevitably visible in everything that he paints. Jaime Hover also suggests that the act of looking at a portrait, and men looking at each other, adds another layer of homoerotic desire to this scene (13). Even the narrator's account of the scene when Dorian first sees his own portrait emphasizes his pleasure in seeing himself, and possibly being looked at by Basil and Lord Henry, "When he saw it he drew back, and his cheeks flushed for a moment with pleasure. A look of joy came into his eyes, as if he had recognized himself for the first time" (33). The two men are both interested in the sitter of the portrait and the portrait enables the expression of admiration and desire between them.

In his study on the sexual aspects of *Dorian Gray*, Ed Cohen (806) suggest that Dorian's whole identity is built between these two contradicting modes of presentation, the verbal sublimation from Lord Henry and the visual expression from Basil. Lord Henry is a conversationalist who influences Dorian with his theories and his "low languid voice that was absolutely fascinating" (28), and Basil influences him with his paintings. Dorian, then, between these two representational modes constitutes his own identity. Within the narrative structure Dorian acts as a "space for the constitution of male desire", as both characters project their own desires and

self-presentations onto him (Cohen, 806). In the beginning Dorian is like a blank canvas and his sense of self only starts to form after the completion of the portrait (Craft, 121). Therefore, the picture of Dorian is not actually a picture of him as much as it is a picture of male desire. At the time of their meeting, Dorian is a young and innocent boy, who Lord Henry then tempts to join him in his exploration of pleasure and secret impulses, and Basil “teaches him to become vain” (180) and forget about his morals, and his idolatry of Dorian ends up ruining them both. Together, these two characters gain control over Dorian and his identity, and how he is represented. Consequently, they control his character development throughout the whole novel. Alison Milbank writes: “The novel is a pass-the-parcel game of influence and substitution, whereby characters infect each other with ideas like a disease. Lord Henry starts the game by infecting Dorian, and is mimicked by Dorian and the Duchess, while even an object, the mysterious yellow book sent round by Wotton, influences Dorian to enact the extravagancies of its hedonistic protagonist” (31). Thus, the novel combines the verbal and the visual on multiple levels: on the surface, there is the verbal narrative and the “visual” portrait of Dorian, and within the narrative there are these two characters that use their visual and verbal modes of presentation to influence Dorian and to create his portrait, which requires both of them in order to be completed.

Then what can we say about Dorian’s sexuality? Homoeroticism in general is mostly hidden in the text and Dorian never directly expresses any desire or romantic feelings towards anyone of the same sex. It seems as if Dorian does not really have a sexual identity of his own. His identity is mostly a consequence of outside influences, and both his portrait and his identity are built on same-sex desire (but not necessarily his own). He seems to be an object of everyone else’s desire but not really a desiring agent himself. Robert Keefe writes: “Dorian is what people make out of him. He is the perfect artist’s model but little more than that. His soul is a perfect tabula rasa...” (64). However, it is possible that there are things about Dorian that the reader is not made aware of. Since the portrait is the only thing that shows Dorian’s true identity, and the text never reveals any details about Dorian’s life and all the terrible acts that he commits, we might only guess what it is that he is doing and what is causing the changes to his painting (and surely the possibility of homosexual acts is among them). Dorian is also scared that when he grows older and is no longer beautiful, he will lose Lord Henry and Basil’s adoration. Being adored and desired by other men seems to be so important to him that without his beauty he would “lose everything” (34), which is why he makes the wish that the portrait would bear this burden for him instead. Dorian might be correct about this, because the desire and the homoeroticism in the novel seem to be mostly based on the visual aspect of it, as the Duchess says, “You men love with your eyes, if you ever love at all” (226).

On the surface the novel mostly conforms to societal expectations about identity and relationships, however, as Jeff Nunokawa writes, “homosexual desire is brazen enough in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to venture past the avenues of intimation where its conduct is generally confined under the rule of canonical standards or family values...” (311). One of the only direct instances of heterosexual desire in the book is Dorian’s brief infatuation with actress Sibyl Vane, although, it can hardly even be called infatuation, as it seems to lack all real feeling and authenticity. Sibyl has lived at the theater and performed on stage her whole life and as a result she has begun to see her life as if it was a play. She is merely a collection of different characters, rather than a real person, according to Lord Henry, “Sibyl Vane represented to you [Dorian] all the heroines of romance – that she was Desdemona one night, and Ophelia the other; that if she died as Juliet, she came to life as Imogen” (120). Much like Dorian, it seems that she has no fixed personality of her own, and is influenced by the art and characters around her. She also regards Dorian, or rather “Prince Charming”, as a character in the play that is her life. It is clear that Dorian, too, only falls for her because of her ability to act out different stories and people every night on stage. Sibyl is an imitation of Shakespeare’s characters, almost like a fictive person, and therefore an easy target for Dorian’s confused feelings. It is also worth mentioning that Dorian seems to find Sibyl most intriguing when she is playing male characters. Dorian recounts her performance to Henry and Basil one night and says, “When she came on in her boy’s clothes – She had never seemed to me more exquisite” (89).

Their short relationship is merely an illusion, an imitation of a love story, and as soon as Sibyl reveals her real self to him, because her love for Dorian has exposed her to real feelings and therefore rendered her unable to act, the illusion is broken and Dorian falls out of love. He tells her, “I loved you – because you realized the dreams of great poets and gave shape and substance to the shadows of art. You have thrown it all away” (102). Daniel Novak notes that “his desire for Sibyl is a model-desire – a desire for the negative capability of the model. But when Sibyl rejects the falseness of theatrical illusion for the ‘reality’ of love, she violates both the aesthetical logic and the erotic logic of the novel, and the results are fatal” (Novak, 23). As soon as she stops being a character and begins to show her real self and identity, she ceases to be the object of Dorian’s desire. This demonstrates how Dorian, in his search for beauty and pleasure, becomes clueless to his real emotions and the realities of life, and his behavior becomes highly immoral. He searches for the ideals that Lord Henry has planted in his head and nothing else seems to suffice.

The first crack in the perfect painting, the first mark of ruin appears after this failed attempt to pursue this socially acceptable relationship. After ending his relationship with Sibyl, Dorian returns

home and discovers that his picture has altered and there is now “a touch of cruelty in the mouth” (105). Dorian panics and hides the picture. At once he realizes that the wish he made at Basil’s house that “he would remain young and beautiful while the portrait bore his sins” is what has altered the picture. Afraid to see any more changes on the canvas, Dorian promises to himself that he will not see Lord Henry anymore, will not listen to his “subtle poisonous theories” (107). He says that he will “resist temptation” and return to Sibyl, “his life with her would be beautiful and pure” (107). There is an implication here that returning to Sibyl and the heterosexual relationship, no matter how inauthentic it was, would be the morally right thing to do, although her suicide prevents this from being a possibility. If he conformed to society’s expectations, the portrait would remain undamaged and his life would be without sin. However, if he decided follow Lord Henry and his temptations, his portrait would have to bear the burden of all of his bad deeds. From this point onwards, Basil and his painting begin to have control and influence over Dorian’s life, and be a guide to him through his life.

After Dorian discovers the magical abilities of his portrait, Basil visits him one day and informs him that he has changed his mind and plans to send the painting to a museum. Perhaps Dorian’s engagement with Sibyl or the fact that he has chosen Lord Henry over Basil, has distanced him from Dorian and his feelings enough so that he can finally exhibit the painting. However, ashamed of what has happened to the portrait, Dorian refuses to show it to him or to have it revealed to everyone in a museum. He remembers Lord Henry telling him once that Basil had a strange reason for refusing to exhibit his picture earlier, and he says, “Basil, we have each of us a secret. Let me know yours, and I shall tell you mine. What was your reason for refusing to exhibit my picture?” After some persuasion, Basil begins his confession and asks if Dorian has noticed anything curious in the picture. He is of course talking about his own feelings that he thinks are visible to anyone who views the picture, but for a moment Dorian thinks that he is somehow aware of the change that has occurred in the painting. Again, this scene demonstrates how these two separate things, Basil’s same-sex desire and Dorian’s sins, are both connected to the portrait, as they are both simultaneously enclosed within it. It also shows how the meaning of paintings can change depending on who is viewing them. In this case, the painter and the sitter both see something entirely different in the painting and it represents different meanings to them. After his secret is nearly exposed to Basil, Dorian realizes that he must get rid of the portrait and never let anyone see it. In the same way that Basil decided earlier to hide his painting from the world, Dorian locks it away in a dark and empty room at the top of his house, away from people’s prying eyes. Throughout the rest of the book he is paranoid about people seeing the portrait and discovering his

secrets. Dorian locking his portrait away in a dark room, a “closet” of sorts, can be seen as a visual equivalent to the notion of secrecy, as well as repression of homoerotic feelings. He is forced to hide a part of his life just as late-Victorian homosexuals had to conceal their sexual activity and true identities (Sanna, 24).

In his final scene with Basil, Dorian finally reveals the altered picture to the painter. He feels resentful towards Basil for painting the picture and for giving it the power to ruin his life. He taunts Basil, “Don’t you see your ideal in it?” to which Basil responds, “There was nothing evil in it [his idolatry], nothing shameful. You were to me such an ideal as I shall never meet again” (180). It is as if Basil’s love for him, the desire and homosexual impulses that were enclosed within the picture ended up bringing Dorian to his ruin, to this confusing newfound aspect of his personality. Although Basil thinks that there was nothing shameful in his adoration for Dorian, he admits, “I worshipped you too much. I am punished for it” (181). And his punishment does come a moment later when Dorian stabs him to death in a moment of rage and loathing. It is his adoration for Dorian that ends up killing him. In the same way that the painting is tied to Dorian, it was always connected to Basil as well. As the artist who created it and signed his name under it, and expressed his deepest feelings in it, the painting was bound to be tied to his soul. In this way, the novel also raises a question about the painter and what Basil’s role is in all of this. Is the portrait also a depiction of Basil as much as it is of Dorian? Portrait can never be a truly objective form of art since it will always contain something of the painter in it as well. In a way, all art is a form of self-portraiture: as Basil says in the beginning of the novel, “every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter” (11). In the end the portrait kills both of them, as if both of their stories were tied to it. As Novak notes, “The painting is not simply Basil’s representation of Dorian”, but also represents Basil and his secret feelings for the subject of his art (Bristow 85). Again, this demonstrates art’s ability to capture feelings of both the sitter and the painter and its power to reveal hidden truths. It is also one of the many instances of duality that are connected to the painting. Although the painting does not directly mirror Basil’s soul in the way that it does Dorian’s, it does reflect his feelings for Dorian and the admiration that he has for him and his beauty.

5. SEDUCTION

Throughout the novel, Dorian is seduced by the hedonistic lifestyle of Lord Henry, which leads him to become increasingly corrupted as he indulges in different pleasures, and his newly found “immortality”. The portrait of Dorian becomes a symbol of this seduction, and the effects it has on Dorian as the story progresses. What was initially supposed to be a reflection of his beauty and innocence, eventually starts to bear the effects of the new life and personality, as well as his newly found sexuality that Lord Henry introduces him to. Dorian’s life starts to go downhill after he meets Henry, and it seems to be the yellow book that Henry gives to him in Chapter 10 (144), which finally seals his fate. The yellow book is widely believed to have been inspired by the novel *À Rebours*, which was one of the books that influenced Wilde in his own life. For a while, Dorian vacillates between Basil and Lord Henry, torn between their influences, until he ultimately chooses Henry and begins living according to his principles: “that curiosity about life which Lord Henry had first stirred in him, as they sat together in the garden of their friend, seemed to increase with gratification. The more he knew, the more he desired to know. He had mad hungers that grew more ravenous as he fed them” (149). The yellow book has an immense influence on Dorian and it causes his moral and mental state to deteriorate even further. In Chapter 11 we see Dorian exploring all of his passions and searching for new sensations in a way that resembles *À Rebours* with its lengthy descriptions of beautiful art and items. Dorian is described as having “entirely lost control” (147) and he is frantically searching for pleasure anywhere that he can find it, which results in more rumors about him and his actions circulating around the town (163). Towards the end of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* there are two works that have a grip on Dorian and shape him as a human: Basil’s painting and the book that Lord Henry gifts to him.

Ultimately, Dorian rejects the strict moral rules of Victorian life and embraces Lord Henry’s “new Hedonism”, a lifestyle of sensations, pleasure and beauty. Once, Dorian almost finds his way back to a life that would be approved by the Victorian society with Sibyl, but even then Dorian is tempted and influenced by Lord Henry. He says, “Your voice and the voice of Sibyl Vane are two things that I shall never forget. When I close my eyes, I hear them, and each of them says something different. I don’t know which to follow” (62). Even when Basil’s painting begins to capture the marks of his corruptions and Dorian can see the effects of this lifestyle that he has chosen, it still does not deter him from following Henry. Dorian challenges societal expectations and rejects a life of mainstream values and the institution of marriage and chooses a life that represents a sort of

counterculture to the norms of the time. Lord Henry can be seen as enabling Dorian's sexual awakening, the construction of his new identity and the sexual experiences that he cultivates.

À Rebours (translated as *Against Nature* or *Against the Grain*) is a novel written by French writer Joris-Karl Huysmans. It is considered one of the classics of the Decadent movement, which was characterized by a rejection of traditional moral and social values and a focus on aesthetic and sensory experiences. It is a highly visual novel that explores themes of beauty and pleasure, and tells the story of Jean Des Esseintes, an aristocrat and dandy, who secludes himself from people and surrounds himself with rare and exotic books, perfumes, art, and spends his time enjoying these various beautiful and refined objects, inviting the reader to take part in this enjoyment. Like *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the novel is highly visual, with descriptions of paintings that are almost like paintings in themselves. As the novel progresses, Des Esseintes becomes increasingly obsessed with his own pleasures, and his isolation and lifestyle begin to take a toll on his mental and physical health. It seems possible that Wilde has at least partly modeled Dorian's character after the main character in *Against Nature*.

Huysmans' novel was published in 1884 and influenced many writers and artists who wanted to explore similar themes of decadence and Aestheticism. Oscar Wilde was among these people who were moved by Des Esseintes' attempt to construct an artistic world around him and took inspiration from the book. Wilde evidently adopted *À Rebours* as a sort of "guidebook" in his life, the same way Pater's book had been for him when he was younger. According to Ellmann, Wilde was fascinated by the book, and it has been reported that especially the homoerotic parts of the novel interested him. Ellmann notes that the book "summoned him towards an underground life totally at variance with his aboveboard role as Constance's husband" (238). This shows the similarity between some of the themes in Wilde's novel and his own life, and how he himself was struggling with sexuality, different influences and impulses, and living a double life at the time that he wrote *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

6. PHYSIOGNOMY AND DUALITY

Much like portraiture, physiognomy claims to be able to reveal the true, inner character of a person by their outward appearance. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, themes of physiognomy are used to create contrast within the narrative and to emphasize Dorian's inner corruption compared to his outer appearance. The novel reveals his true intentions and inner self by creating physical manifestations of these traits. The idea that there is a link between appearance and morality has been deeply engrained into people's thinking and their assumptions. In some respects, Wilde undermines the point that to be good is to be beautiful, and vice versa, by showing that this might not always be the case. Dorian appears beautiful to other people even when, according to his actions, he should not. In the end, however, when Dorian stabs his own portrait, his outward appearance finally becomes one with his decaying soul.

Physiognomy is the practice of assessing an individual's character or personality based on their physical appearance, especially their facial features. Johann Kaspar Lavater, one of the most important figures in the development of the science, notes, "We know that nothing passes in the soul which does not produce some change in the body; and particularly, that no desire, no act of willing, is exerted by the soul without some corresponding motion, at the same time, taking place in the body" (Lavater, 25). Physiognomy has a varied history, "shifting from wide acceptance and mass popularity to challenges and outright rejection" (Lindauer, 23). While the science was "rather quickly debunked by the medical establishment" in the 19th century, it nevertheless became "popular with the public" (Marshall, 161). The practice of physiognomy dates back to Ancient Greece, and it persisted through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, all the way to the 18th and 19th centuries (Devriese, 3), and has been used by scholars, artists and philosophers to make judgements about people's moral character and personality.

Physiognomy plays a role in many novels of the day. As Lindauer observes, depicting fictional characters in physiognomic terms is common in literature, going back at least to Homer's time (53). Many Victorian creators and artists deployed physiognomic messages in order to subconsciously convey character information, however Wilde perhaps went farther than most other writers in infringing on the territory of artists by painting literary portraits of his characters (Stetz, 247). A writer can turn to physiognomy as a means of emphasizing the distinction between external appearance and internal reality of a character. Essentially, it separates the inner and outer sides of a person, much like the portrait in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. According to Lindauer, "Physiognomy is especially prominent in portraits which, like physiognomy, are based on the

general premise that physical or outward appearances are signs of inner character and mental states” (50). Good and evil characters in novels are often marked with their respective facial features and can be easily identified by the reader. Readers came to expect physiognomic allusions and hints to the character of people based on their facial features and parts of the body. Interest in physiognomy peaked in the late 18th century (Lindauer, 24) and so the idea that evil can be seen in the face of a character has often been employed specifically in gothic novels. In the 19th century, this focus on facial features and marking characters as evil “were not merely fictional devices, but were based on the contemporary sciences of phrenology and physiognomy” (Marshall, 161). Some also contrasted external appearance and internal character (Lindauer, 54), like in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, where the villain of the book is also the most beautiful of all the characters.

Dorian’s identity in the novel is clearly divided into two separate parts: the portrait that carries his sins and bad deeds and the actual character of Dorian. This kind of double identity, a divide between how you perceive yourself and how you are perceived by others, is brought to the fore with the clear contrast of painting-Dorian and real Dorian, although, in a way, the painting is the real Dorian. This point is emphasized in the beginning of the novel, for example when Basil says to Dorian, “Well, as soon as you are dry, you shall be varnished and framed, and sent home. Then you can do what you like with yourself” (36). It provides a true representation of his identity and sexuality, yet it is a part of himself that he wishes to keep secret and lock away. Meanwhile, the character of Dorian mostly maintains his good image and the public perception of him remains unchanged despite all that he has done, since “in the opinion of most people his frank debonair manner, his charming boyish smile, and the infinite grace of that wonderful youth that seemed never to leave him, were in themselves a sufficient answer to the calumnies” (163). No one seems to believe anything bad about him because they believe that he is too beautiful to be bad, and no one can see the real him, hidden in the portrait that is locked away in his attic. Dorian is an exceptional literary villain in the sense that his evilness and bad deeds are not apparent on his face. Even when rumors start circulating about his tendency to ruin everyone he meets, Basil tells him, “I don’t believe these rumors at all. At least, I don’t believe them when I see you -- you, Dorian, with your pure, bright, innocent face, and your marvelous untroubled youth – I can’t believe anything against you” (172). Even after he has killed Basil, maybe the only man who ever truly cared about him, he tries to confess the murder to Lord Henry, who simply says, “All crime is vulgar, just as all vulgarity is crime. It is not in you, Dorian, to commit murder. I am sorry if I hurt your vanity by saying so, but I assure you it is true” (244).

The idea of beauty as a sign of goodness already existed in ancient societies, in the school of physiognomy. According to Bridget M. Marshall, at the heart of this obsession with heads and faces is the question of evil, and whether it is innate (162). Marshall also makes a connection between physiognomy, criminality and homosexuality, since the criminal characteristics were often associated with sexuality, and physiognomy could offer tools to recognize criminals and homosexuals through their physical features (167). Wilde writes the following: “Sin is a thing that writes itself across a man’s face. It cannot be concealed. If a wretched man has a vice, it shows itself in the lines of his mouth, the droop of his eyelids, the moulding of his hand even” (172). Throughout the story Dorian is described as someone who is too pure and innocent to do anything immoral and there is a focus on his beauty even when he commits sinful acts. However, the physical deformities do eventually appear, the more corrupted Dorian becomes, but they are only visible in the painting. Wilde’s story thus focuses more on the effects of sin on the appearance and not really the sins themselves. The reader does not know what it is that Dorian is doing, only that his painting is constantly changing because of it. Again, the written text and the painting hold different pieces of information within them. The painting holds the details about Dorian’s misdeeds and his private, possibly homoerotic, desires.

Dorian lives a double life where there is a clear divide between his private wants and desires, and him trying to maintain an acceptable and respectable public image in the eyes of the society around him. The way Dorian hides his portrait, a representation of his true self, in a dark room in his house and indulges in his secret desires in the safety of these dark and hazy places such as opium dens, which are secluded from the public, is reminiscent of the way homosexuals, especially in the 19th century, had to hide and deny a part of themselves. For instance, the rumor that Dorian “had been seen brawling with foreign sailors in a low den in the distant parts of Whitechapel” (163), an area which is, as Sanna notes, “an inner-city, impoverished working-class locale in the East End of London, which was associated with criminality”, could easily be interpreted “as an allusion to the encounters between homosexual men in the dark suburbs of the city at the end of the century” (Sanna, 29).

Physiognomic discussions have also long been a part of the typological construction of characters, and physiognomy has an ekphrastic value: certain realities that might not be directly visible can be presented visually through the description of facial and bodily features. According to the notion of ekphrasis, it is common that the written can tell us one part of the story while the visual can tell us another part or something contradicting. Brian Glavey also notes that, “the story of modern sexuality necessarily revolves around the relation between what can be seen and what can

be said” (9). In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the ekphrastic description of the portrait and the character of Dorian reveal the complex themes of identity and morality in the novel. *Dorian Gray* shows the danger of judging people or their moral goodness solely based on their appearances, and how Dorian’s suppression of his true self, his need to maintain a respectable appearance in Victorian society and his inability to reconcile his public image with his private desires, all contribute to his ultimate downfall.

7. CONCLUSION

Decades after his death, the discussions about Wilde's life and work still continue, and Wilde remains an important figure in the world of queer literature. Wilde lived a life that was many ways similar to his story and had a tragic ending of his own. An opinion that is commonly held about Wilde is that he was a modern man who was ahead of his own time. The idolization of youth and exploration of sexuality are perhaps among the topics that have ensured the ever-growing popularity of this novel and made it remain so evergreen and ever-young. As Ellmann writes about Wilde, "He belongs to our world more than to Victoria's. Now, beyond the reach of scandal, his best writings validated by time, he comes before us still, a towering figure, laughing and weeping, with parables and paradoxes, so generous, so amusing, and so right" (553). In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde's love and appreciation for beauty, youth, hedonism, art, theater and Hellenic ideals, all come together to create a novel where art, literature and culture truly meet. In its core, it is a story about a young man who is living at the junction between Victorian values and modern ideals.

Within the pages of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde creates a literary portrait of a young man who is seduced into following all his desires and seeking pleasures, and who quickly loses his soul to his immoral lifestyle. The portrait and the man depicted within it are constantly changing as the story progresses and the portrait encompasses everything that happens to Dorian in the story, although we only see the physical effects of Dorian's sins in the few scenes in which he examines the portrait. The portrait is where the story begins and where it ends. The novel, as well as Dorian's journey to his own ruin, begins when the painting of Dorian is completed and ends when it is destroyed. Therefore, the novel and the portrait have the same lifespan, as if the novel itself was also a portrait of sorts.

Beauty is arguably the most significant theme of the novel. There is beauty in Wilde's every carefully crafted sentence, all the descriptions of beautiful objects and locations, and most importantly, characters. More specifically, there is an appreciation for male beauty and the desire between men. Wilde has somewhat of a habit of using mirrors and portraits in his fiction as symbols and metaphors. In this story it is central to the storyline and important insofar that it is essentially where Dorian's character is conceived and a space where same-sex desire could be discussed. Basil and Dorian's relationship is mainly based on the artistic aspect of it, and Basil's homoerotic feelings for Dorian are expressed in his paintings. Even when he expresses his feelings verbally, it is always somehow connected to the portrait. The portrait signifies hidden desires, the exploration of personal identity and Dorian's unspoken, sinful acts.

There is a clear divide in the story between the visual and verbal, and between the inner and outer versions of a person. The portrait acts as a verbal icon that gives us information about what is under the surface of the text. For example, while the story mostly conforms to the heteronormative expectations of the time, same-sex desire and homoeroticism make themselves visible with the help of the portrait. Not much is said about Dorian's real identity or sexuality, and the details of his new lifestyle are kept hidden in the written text, but the portrait knows the truth about Dorian and all of Dorian's unspoken acts are visible in it. Every discussion about beauty, hidden homoerotic feelings, seduction and desire returns to Dorian's portrait, and it is a key part of his sexual awakening and the construction of his identity. The novel explores the two different sides of Dorian, the one he keeps hidden and the one that the world can see, and shows us how evilness, or what a society deems evil, can often be visibly seen on a person's face, but how we cannot always trust someone simply based on their physical appearance either. Comparing the portrait and the written narrative of the story, we get a sense of the double life that Dorian leads. This aspect of the portrait can be seen as a metaphorical representation of the way in which homosexuals, especially in the 19th century, had to be secretive about their real identities and were forced to hide parts of themselves. The portrait, which has homoerotic desire encoded within it in multiple ways must be hidden and confined inside the walls of Dorian's house so that he can maintain his good appearances and hide his true self.

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