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**THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
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**MASTER'S THESIS**

**A THEMATIC STUDY OF THE GOTHIC ELEMENTS  
IN OSCAR WILDE'S *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY*:  
DECADENCE, HORROR AND VIOLENCE**

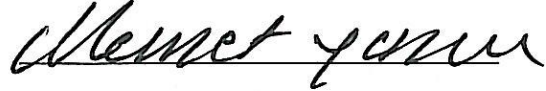
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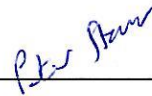


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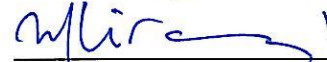
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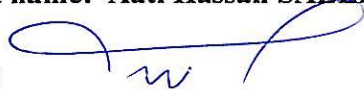


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## **ABSTRACT**

### **A THEMATIC STUDY OF THE GOTHIC ELEMENTS IN OSCAR WILDE'S *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY*: DECADENCE, HORROR AND VIOLENCE**

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This study aims to highlight the three Gothic elements in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: decadence, horror, and violence. As a typical example of Gothic fiction, the novel involves various features of the genre. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* includes the fundamental themes and motifs of traditional Gothic works, which seem to have had a deep influence on Oscar Wilde's vision. The most dominant theme in the novel is decadence, which can be found in most of the events and situations in the story. Oscar Wilde was deeply affected by the French movement *Fin-de-siècle*. This accounts for the pervasive atmosphere of decadence in the novel, as reflected in Dorian's fall into corruption, as well as in desolate places such as dark streets and the opium den. Additionally, the themes of horror and violence can be clearly seen in the novel. The theme of horror starts with the supernatural changes that occur in Dorian's portrait, goes on with the horror of being in desolate places, and ends up with crimes. There are two

incidents in the novel that can be considered to be related to violence; namely, an act of murder (Dorian kills Basil) and an accidental death that occurs in the forest (James Vane is killed by a hunter). Besides, sometimes violence may turn inward. The theme of self-inflicted violence is exemplified first by Sybil's and later by Dorian's suicide. In addition to the three main features of the Gothic found in the novel—decadence, horror and violence—there are other Gothic elements such as supernatural, doubles, vanity, darkness and death. The supernatural aspect of Dorian's picture becomes evident as the handsome man in the picture magically changes into an old and horrible figure. With each sinful act Dorian commits, a supernatural change occurs in the picture and the man in the portrait grows uglier. In fact, the picture reflects the corruption of Dorian's soul and his sinful acts. At the end of the novel, Dorian commits suicide and the ugly man in the picture becomes transformed to a handsome young man. The poetic justice that takes place at the end of the story shows that the good and right always prevail against the evils and injustices of the world. Whoever falls into corruption and commits sinful acts will surely be defeated sooner or later. Another lesson one can take from the story is that nothing in this universe is permanent. Dorian wants to keep his youth permanently, so he indulges in all kinds of pleasure with a sheer indifference to the traditional Victorian values and norms, but ultimately he fails and faces his tragic end.

**Keywords:** Gothic fiction, decadence, fear, movement , genre, the picture, supernatural changes , soul, aging, sensual pleasures, dark and desolate places, double character, commit suicide.

## ÖZET

### OSCAR WILDE'İN *DORIAN GRAY'IN RESMİ: ÇÖKÜŞ, KORKU VE ŞİDDET* (*THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY: DECADENCE, HORROR AND VIOLENCE*) ADLI ROMANINDAKİ GOTİK UNSURLAR HAKKINDA KONULU BİR ÇALIŞMA

Aati Hassan SALEH

İngiliz Edebiyatı ve Kültürel Çalışmalar Bölümü Mastır Diploması

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Bu çalışma, *Dorian Gray'in Resmi: çöküş, dehşet ve şiddet* romanındaki üç Gotik unsurun vurgulanmasını amaçlamaktadır. Gotik kurgunun tipik bir örneği olarak roman, çeşitli cinsiyet karakteristiklerini ele alır. Oscar Wilde'nin bakış açında derin bir etki yarattığı düşünülen temel tema ve geleneksel gotik çalışma motifleri de (*The Picture of Dorian Gray'e*) romana edilmiştir. Romandaki hakim tema, hikâyenin çoğu yerinde ve işlediği çoğu konuda bulunan, çöküştür. Oscar Wilde, *Fin-de-siècle*, Fransız harekâtından derinden etkilenmiştir. Bu da, Dorian'ın doğru yoldan sapmasında yansıdığı üzere تنها karanlık sokaklarda, afyon/uyuşturucu batağında da yansıyan çöküş atmosferinin romana yayılmasına sebep olmuştur. Buna ek olarak korku ve şiddet temaları da romanda açık bir biçimde görülebilir. Korku teması, Dorian'ın portresinde meydana gelen doğaüstü değişikliklerle başlar ve تنها köşelerde bulunmanın verdiği dehşetle devam eder ve daha sonra işlenen suçlarla son bulur. Romanda, şiddete ilişkin sayılabilecek iki olay bulunmaktadır ve bunlardan biri öldürme eylemi (Dorian Basil'i öldürür), diğeri de ormanda gerçekleşen ve ölümle sonuçlanan bir kazadır (James Vane bir avcı tarafından öldürülür). Bunların yanı sıra şiddet bazen içe dönük olabilmektedir. İnsanın kendisine uyguladığı şiddet ilk önce Sybil'in ve daha sonra Doris'in intiharıyla tema olarak

örneklenmiştir. Roman içinde bulunan üç ana Gotik özelliğe –çöküş, korku ve şiddet- ek olarak doğüstülük, ikililik, batıllılık, karanlık ve ölüm gibi diğer Gotik öğelerde ilave edilmiştir. Dorian'ın resminin doğüstülük kısmı, resimdeki yakışıklı adamın sihirli bir biçimde yaşlı ve çirkin bir şekil almasıyla gerçekleşir. Dorian'ın işlediği günahla birlikte resimde doğüstü bir değişiklik gerçekleşir ve resimdeki adam giderek çirkinleşir. Aslında resim Dorian'ın ruhundaki yolsuzluğu ve onun günahkâr eylemlerini yansıtmaktadır. Romanın sonunda Dorian intihar eder ve resimdeki çirkin adam yakışıklı bir delikanlıya dönüşür. Hikâyenin sonunda yer alan ilahi adalet dünyadaki kötülük ve haksızlıklara karşı iyilik ve dürüstlüğün daima kazandığını gösterir. Doğruluktan sapan ve günah işleyen herkes er ya da geç kaybeder. Hikâyeden çıkarılabilecek bir diğer derste bu dünyadaki her şeyin geçici olduğu, kalıcı olmadığıdır. Dorian gençliğini ölümsüzleştirmek istemekte ve bu yüzden geleneksel Muhafazakar değer ve normlarla hiç alakası olmayan türlü zevklere kapılır ama sonunda başarısız olup kendi trajik sonuyla yüzleşir.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Gotik kurgu, çöküş, korku, hareket, resim, doğüstü değişiklikler, ruh, yaşlanma, tür, şehvetli zevkler, karanlık ve ıssız yerler, çift karakter, intihar etmek.

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## INTRODUCTION

This study aims to highlight the main Gothic elements in Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which is an example of Gothic fiction including several elements of the genre such as decadence, fear, and violence. This paper will discuss in detail three elements of gothic fiction found in the novel -decadence, horror and violence- though there are other gothic themes such as supernatural, villain, double characters, isolation and death themes, as well as dark and desolate places in London which represent Gothic settings. From a psychological perspective, one can safely say that decadence is the most critical factor because it often breeds horror and violence. When a person indulges in decadent actions, s(he) immediately goes looking for violence and commit crimes. Even in holy books such as the Bible and Quran, decadence precedes horror and violence, leading to many sins and crimes.

In order to understand the significance and implications of the major Gothic elements in the novel, it will be useful to provide some background information about the Gothic genre; including several definitions of the term Gothic, the works of leading authors who wrote in the Gothic tradition, and Oscar Wilde's own experiences, which account for his interest in the Gothic genre which is reflected in his main literary works.

The word Gothic originally came from a group of European tribes in ancient history; so, it is used to refer to the German tribe of the Goths. Later on, the term came to mean "Germanic", later on "medieval". Presently, the term Gothic usually denotes a style of architecture. The Goths are believed to have lived on the island of Gotland in Denmark. The word "Goths" derives from the stem Gutan, which survives in the modern Scandinavian tribal name Gutes. The Goths were an East Germanic people. The Visigoths and the Ostrogoths had played an important role in the fall of the Roman

Empire and the emergence of Medieval Europe. They were speaking a Germanic language. The Gothic is an extinct Germanic language. The Gothic language and culture vanished during the Middle Ages, although its influence endured in some western European states.

The term Gothic also refers to the (pseudo)-medieval buildings in which many of these stories take place. This extreme form of romanticism was very popular in England and Germany. Generally, haunted places such as castles, crypts, gloomy mansions and convents were a popular setting for the Gothic theme. Another important means to establish the typical uncanny atmosphere was the use of supernatural elements such as apparitions, skeletons, vampires etc. In addition, the Gothic genre emerged directly from the changes in the cultural context of the eighteenth century. It stood for the contrast between the old-fashioned and the modern, or the barbaric as opposed to the civilized. So Gothic was always the archaic, the pagan, which refused to establish a civilized and well-regulated society. Also, Gothic in literature has supernatural elements such as absolute monastery, ghosts, evil figures, etc.. This reminds us of terrifying legends, myths, dark and frightening places such as monasteries, castles, caves, forests, etc. These elements commonly found in the Gothic contributed to creating a new world full of supernatural elements: ghosts, demons, spirits, etc.

Gothic fiction is largely categorized under the subgenre of Gothic horror; hence, it is considered to be a genre or mode of literature that combines fiction, horror and romanticism. From another point of view, Douglas H. Thompson says that “the Gothic, with its gallery of dissipated aristocrats, expresses middle-class rage against unchecked aristocratic power” (Thompson, 2002, p. 406). The gothic in literature as it appeared in the eighteenth century represented a reaction against the Enlightenment. As well as, In his thesis on the use of Gothic in literature, Jose Manuel Correoso Rodenas:

During the eighteenth century, European society was overwhelmed by reason; as a result, some cultivated people began to write —gothic pieces of literature. Most of these writers

belonged to a high social class (Walpole himself was counselor to the king of England). They created a new canon of aesthetics in which reason, morality, beauty and customs were eliminated.<sup>6</sup> At the end of the century, the medieval past of European countries was recovered by these people. (Rodenas, 2013, p.11)

The Gothic genre originated in England in the second half of the eighteenth century and flourished in the nineteenth century. Its origin is attributed to English author Horace Walpole, the writer of the famous novel *The Castle of Otranto* in 1763, subtitled (in its second edition) "A Gothic Story." The effect of Gothic fiction depends on a curious mixture of the element of terror and the search for pleasure, the latter being an extension of Romantic literary pleasures that were relatively new at the time when Walpole's novel was written.

The 1880s saw the revival of the Gothic as a powerful literary form associated with *Fin-de-siècle*, a highly influential movement that proved to be the driving force behind many works of fiction, which reflected contemporary fears like ethical degeneration and questioned the social structures of the time. *Fin-de-siècle* is a French movement which influenced many European countries. The term becomes suitable to the sentiments and traits linked with the culture. The ideas and concerns developed *Fin-de-siècle* artists provided the motives for movements like symbolism and modernism. The themes of *Fin-de-siècle* political culture were very controversial and have been cited as a major influence on fascism. The major political theme of the era was that of revolt against materialism, rationalism, positivism, bourgeois society and liberal democracy. *Fin-de-siècle* literature explored the darkest recesses of Victorian society. Oscar Wilde had been greatly influenced by the *Fin-de-siècle*, which found reflection in his writings, especially *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. So this movement is known to have been a revolt against the prevailing realists and naturalists of the time, as well as against the new classical and romanticism.

Horace Walpole also wrote melodrama and parody (including self-parody), which were the other prominent features of the Gothic fiction. Another gothic novel

written in this period is *History of the Caliph Vathek* (1786) by William Beckford, which represents the eighteenth century fashion for oriental tales with the newly-established gothic tradition. The third novel is *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) by Ann Radcliffe, whose work anticipates the Irish author Bram Stoker's ability to describe landscapes unseen by the author. Another gothic work written in the eighteenth century is *The Monk* (1796), by Matthew Lewis which holds an important place within the Gothic genre with its themes of sexual desire and the abuse of power.

Distinctive features of the Gothic genre can be clearly seen in the works of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and the works of Edgar Allan Poe. *Frankenstein* is the first fictional vampire tale depicting a monster like *Count Dracula*. Another well-known novel that belongs to this genre is Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, which was written in the late Victorian era (1897). Also, *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) by Charles Maturin represents the beginning of the Irish Gothic tradition, it is considered by some the greatest of all gothic works. Representing a significant improvement in the evolution of the genre, *Melmoth* profoundly influenced some of the most important writers of the nineteenth century, including Scott, Thackeray and Baudelaire. During the nineteenth century several other gothic works appeared; among these can be cited *Salathiel the Immortal* (1829) by George Croly, *Varney the Vampire* or *The Feast of Blood* (1847) by James Malcolm Rymer, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1887) by Robert Louis Stevenson. In the Victorian era, Edgar Allan Poe was an important re-interpreter of the Gothic fiction because Gothic had ceased to be the dominant genre and had been rejected by most critics. Later, there was a revival of interest in a number of previously neglected Penny Blood or Penny Dreadful serial fictions by such authors as G.W.M. Reynolds who wrote a trilogy of Gothic horror novels: *Faust* (1846), *Wagner the Wehrwolf* (1847) and *The Necromancer* (1857). Reynolds was also the writer of another famous novel, *The Mysteries of London* (1844), which has an important place in the development of the urban area as a particularly Victorian Gothic setting. Among the other gothic novels that are worth mentioning are *The Devil's Elixirs* (1815) by E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Wuthering Heights* (1847) by Emily Brontë, *Sheridan Le Fanu: In A Glass Darkly* (1872), *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839) by Edgar Allan Poe, *The Picture*

*of Dorian Gray* (1891) by Oscar Wilde. As well as, Oscar Wilde wrote two extra Gothic short stories beside this novel: *The Canterville Ghost* (1887) and *Lord Arthur Saville's Crime, and the biblically-inspired drama* (1893).

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), the Irish writer who is known for his interest in the Gothic genre, was born into a prominent family in Dublin, Ireland. During the 1880's Wilde would establish himself as a writer, poet, and lecturer. In 1890, he published his well-known novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The biggest influences on his development as an artist at the time were Charles Swinburne, Walter Pater and John Ruskin. When Pater introduced the philosophy of "art for art's sake"<sup>1</sup> to Oscar Wilde. In the summer of 1891, Wilde met Lord Alfred Douglas, the son of the Marquis of Queensberry and an undergraduate at Oxford. His resulting relationship with Alfred, nicknamed "Bosie", was to alter the course of the rest of his life. Rumors spread out in London Society of Wilde's homosexual tendencies and practices. Over time he had grown increasingly reckless about secretive liaisons with stable boys, clerks and servants, leaving himself susceptible to frequent blackmailing attempts. Later, Wilde was sentenced for his homosexual relationships. Oscar Wilde was also turning to alcohol and his friends write of often seeing him in an intoxicated state. He had a notorious life characterized by indulgence in decadence and corruption, which is reflected in his major works like *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and by reflecting his own life style with some of his characters.

Oscar Wilde makes the principles of hedonism and decadence the central theme in the novel. As a matter of fact, Dorian and Lord Henry's homosexual tendencies and their indulgence in sensual pleasures can be viewed as a reflection of Oscar Wilde's own lifestyle. As Philip Dossick points out, "Oscar Wilde seeks only for pleasure and discounts beforehand the conditions that life dictate for the same; the conditions laid down containing no guarantee that the pleasure will be actually grasped except only in

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<sup>1</sup> Art for art's sake" in the nineteenth century, the usual English performs a French slogan, "l'art pour l'art", and expresses a philosophy that the intrinsic value of art, and the only "true" art, is divorced from any didactic, moral, or utilitarian function.

promise and anticipation.” (Dossick, 2013, p.3). In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* the two main characters (Dorian and Lord Henry) give free rein to their hedonistic desires, with a sheer indifference to traditional Victorian values. Also, like Oscar Wilde himself, these characters have been influenced by the French movement *Fin-de-siècle*. In the novel, Lord Henry gives Dorian *The Yellow book*, which leads to the protagonist’s deterioration. Oscar Wilde was influenced by the same book, which bears testimony to the fact that his characters believe in the same ideologies as the writer did.

The response to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* at the time was negative, for the novel depicted the underground Victorian culture which Oscar Wilde was part of. The novel was also used at trial to prove Oscar Wilde’s homosexuality, which is almost inseparable from the theme of decadence as an important Gothic element in the novel. The homosexual allusions in the novel as well as in his other works caused the writer to suffer in his lifetime. Wilde’s life seems to have reflected Dorian’s life, as Wilde felt that, like the protagonist of his novel, he was leading a dual-life, thus proving his argument that life imitates art. Oscar Wilde risked his own reputation to depict the reality behind what appears to be. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, after the protagonist becomes involved in decadence and corruption, he starts to commit crimes. In fact, Dorian is responsible for his beloved’s suicide and he murders his friend Basil, the artist of his picture. Then, he calls his former friend Alan Campbell, a young scientist, and he forces and threatens him to use chemical materials to discard and hide his friend’s body. Ultimately, Alan Campbell accepts to do so. The use of chemicals to cover up an act of murder is part of the violence that characterizes the Gothic genre. So, Dorian commits many other acts of violence throughout the novel which culminate in his killing himself. Dorian’s vanity (false pride), one of the seven deadly sins, becomes the central point of focus in this horrific tale of madness, and violence.

There are many critical approaches to the novel, one of which is based on biographical criticism, an approach that presupposes understanding the author’s biography to comprehend his/her work better. Most readers can understand the implications of the actions in the novel by trying to gain an insight into Wilde’s traits and tendencies as reflected in his personal and professional experiences. As a matter of



fact, what happens in the story and the characters portrayed in the novel seem to be a reflection of the author's own life. Another approach to the novel is Psychological Criticism. Sigmund Freud is one of the fundamental figures in psychological criticism, whose .....“psychoanalytic theories of human behavior by exploring new or controversial areas like wish-fulfillment, sexuality, and the unconscious. and repression” as well as expanding our understanding of how “language and symbols operate by demonstrating their ability to reflect unconscious fears or desires (Adek Dyah,2011, p.11). In the light of Freud's theory, Dorian is looking for wish-fulfillment and sexuality. The third way of analyzing the novel is Mythological Criticism, which combines insights from anthropology, psychology, history, and comparative religion. Mythological criticism concentrates on how the individual imagination uses myths and symbols of different cultures and epochs. Carl Jung's theories about the unconscious laid the foundations of Mythological Criticism. The use of myths in some passages in the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* involves certain Gothic elements. The picture's diversion from beauty and magnificence to an ugly shape depicts the supernatural diversion imported from old myths and represents a supernatural element in the story.

Dark desire and prohibited pleasure are the main gothic themes and motifs in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which is often considered to be the best example of Late-Victorian Gothic fiction. The protagonist of the novel, Dorian, indulges in decadent actions and vanity, which leads him to commits several crimes. Actually, the homosexual overtones of the novel can be viewed as a reflection of Oscar Wilde's peculiar lifestyle. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) tells the story of a man who falls into perversion and violence, but who, unlike the man in the portrait, will not grow older. His portrait, on the other hand, gradually ages in time, which represents the decay of Dorian's soul. Dorian struggles to repent, but is unable to do so. His failure to change his ways leads ultimately to his death. One might think that Wilde felt the same sort of hopelessness and sorrow as expressed by his protagonist.

The character of Dorian Gray shares many features with the characters in the works of other Gothic authors. Dorian bears resemblance to Dr Jekyll in Robert Louis Stevenson's novel *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. In this novel, there are two personalities within Dr. Jekyll, one apparently good and the other evil. It is like in Dorian Gray's character. As well as, both heroes aim for hedonism. On the other hand, one can relate Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* with the legend of Faust, the protagonist of a classic German legend. Faust is a successful scholar, but he is dissatisfied with his life, which leads him to make a treaty with the devil. Thus, Faust exchanges his soul for unlimited knowledge and secular pleasures. Likewise, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian succumbs to the temptation to achieve ageless beauty. He chooses to sell his soul in order to keep his beauty as long as he lives. On the other hand, in both stories, a male protagonist seduces a beautiful woman to make her love him, and then destroys her life.

At first, Dorian Gray feels grateful to Basil for the picture he painted, in which he appears as a young man unaffected by immoral actions. After Basil draws Dorian's portrait, he admires and loves the poser. Dorian wishes that he could stay young and not change forever, like the painting. However, as the protagonist's inner self eventually degrades, so does the picture. Though his moral degradation remains ambiguous, eventually it becomes explicit. Dorian Gray indulges in decadent pleasures, controlling and destroying others who admire him, at one point leading a girl to commit suicide when he refuses her. This event starts him down a dark road along which he manipulates and takes advantage of the other characters. When he is confronted by Basil, Dorian murders his old friend. This evil act seems to have made no effect on Dorian. However, at the end of the novel, Dorian becomes so terribly horrified by his own actions that he tears the painting into pieces, and thus destroying himself after he cuts the portrait with a knife.

## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.1 THE THEME OF DECADENCE

This chapter aims to explain the origin and meaning of the term “decadence”. Within this context, several definitions of this term will be presented, along with an account of how the term has become integrated into literary works. Special emphasis will be put on the periods when the term became popular in literature. Additionally, the most famous literary figures who wrote about decadence will be mentioned. Especially, Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a good example of the way the theme of Decadence is reflected in English literature. Accordingly, this chapter involves references to the elements of decadence found in the novel such as corruption in dealing with others, homo-erotics, the yellow book, the opium den, and so on.

The word “decadence”, which means decline in an abstract sense, is also used to suggest a perceptible decay in standards of morals, dignity, and religious faith. It may refer to decline in art or literature or generally to self-indulgent behavior. The term of decadence usually implies a critical approach from a moral perspective. Decadence in literature flourished in the late nineteenth century with *Fen- de- siècle* movement. Interestingly enough, this literary trend was closely associated with symbolism and aesthetics. There are other definitions of the term decadence that consider it to be a literary movement of late nineteenth-century France and England, characterized by refined works of art and the search for new sensations. By and large, the term refers to a period of decay, deterioration or decline in morality and arts. So, as Rojas Ana puts it:

The term Decadence, which refers to a late nineteenth-century literary movement, comes from the Latin verb “decadere”, meaning to fall away, and hence is synonymous with decline. However, there is no

record of the word's use in Roman period. With the publication of Edward Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* in the late eighteenth century, Roman civilization became firmly associated with the idea of political decline and moral decay. This association with Roman corruption led the French critic Désiré Nisard to apply the word decadence to literature (Ana, 1834, p.47).

In the 19th century, a number of French writers such as Charles Baudelaire and Théophile Gautier became associated with this genre. In England; Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symons, and Ernest Dowson, who were often regarded as the leading writers in the English decadent tradition, employed elements of decadence in their works. Arthur Symons was the first openly to champion the movement in English introduce his subsequent book *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899) by suggesting that “the decadent movement was a perverse product of lesser men and a straying aside from the main road of literature” ( Symons, 2014, p.4)

The yellow book represents one of the main instruments of decadent writings. It was published in London from 1894 to 1897 by Elkin Mathews and John Lane, It is generally characterized by an interest in deterioration, ennui (a feeling of weariness and discontent resulting from boredom), art for art's sake, excessive modes of sexuality, artificiality, and decay . By the end of the century, decadence had spread into many other European countries as an aesthetic term. Decadence became a vital force in England during the 1890s and thrived as one of the dominant subjects of a cultural debate regarding degeneration and the *Fin-de-siècle*. The aim of the authors who included elements of decadence in their works is to create a narrative without a plot. A novel without a plot would seemingly disintegrate, but paradoxically, a text without a plot moves forward as it moves in different directions.

Some critics called Oscar Wilde as a passive imitator in his decadent theme especially when he shared the theme of decadence in his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* with Joris-Karl Huysmans's novel *Rebours*. Both of them shared the theme of decline and deterioration. Also Wilde admired *Rebours* and it is clear in chapter 11

when Dorian's life changed by the mystery of the "Yellow book, a novel without a plot, and with only one character.

Max Simon Nordau (1849 – 1923) wrote a number of controversial books about decadence, such as *Degeneration* (1892), and *Paradoxes* (1896). Nordau's major work *Degeneration* is a moralistic attack on so-called degenerate art, as well as against the effects of a field of the rising social phenomena of the period, such as rapid urbanization and its effects on the human body.

In addition to Oscar Wilde, who wrote on the theme of homosexuality, the French philosopher Michel Foucault, wrote a book titled *The History of Sexuality*. A social theorist, philologist and literary critic, Michel Foucault turned his attention to sex and gave an iconoclastic<sup>2</sup> explanation of modern sexual history.

## 1-2 THE CULT OF BEAUTY

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a novel of decadence that depicts the story of a presentable young man who sells his soul to the devil to achieve eternal youth and beauty. The tale of Dorian Gray's moral disintegration caused a scandal when it first appeared in 1890, but Wilde's work was severely criticized for the novel's corrupting influence on community. Just a few years later, the book and the aesthetic/moral dilemma that was presented became the main subject of the trials caused by Wilde's homosexual attachments. There are many types of decadence in the novel such as homosexuality, immoral crimes, drug addiction etc. From the beginning to the end of the novel, elements of decadence and corruption generate horror and violence. Oscar Wilde

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<sup>2</sup> Attacking or ignoring cherished beliefs and long held traditions, etc., as being based on error, superstition, or lack of creativity.

makes a strong connection between corruption and decadence in his novel with liberation from old values, as Vladimír Hůlka says:

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde tightly connects the theme of moral corruption and degeneration with the liberation from all moral values, especially with the (homo) sexual liberation which is, according to many critics, including Clausson, the central element of the self-development proclaimed by Wilde mainly by mouth of Lord Henry, especially in his (Lord Henry's) principal sermon to Dorian in Chapter One of the book. (Hůlka , 2005, p.33)

According to Wilde's perspective, achieving self-pleasure and corruption is done by the liberation from moral values. These values have reflected in Lord Henry's thought throughout the story.

Basil, the painter of Dorian's portrait, admires Dorian's beauty, which leads him to keep this painting. So, Basil doesn't want to exhibit this picture in an art gallery in London because he doesn't want to reveal the secret of his soul through this portrait. He knows that the portrait reflects what he hides in himself. As Basil says:

Every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter. The sitter is merely the accident, the occasion. It is not he who is revealed by the painter; it is rather the painter who, on the colored canvas, reveals himself. The reason I will not exhibit this picture is that I am afraid that I have shown in it the secret of my own soul (Wilde, 2013, p. 13).

This is a hint of Basil's sexual attachment to Dorian. However, Basil does not want anyone to discover this fact. The above extract suggests that Basil feels homosexually attracted to Dorian, as Luljeta Muriqi puts it: "The homoerotic feelings of the painter Basil are clear and unmistakable when he describes his first meeting with Dorian in a passionate tone. Being overwhelmed by Dorian, he was afraid his personality would

absorb his whole nature and whole soul” (Muriqi, 2007, p.5). Another critic, Peter Raby, supports the idea of Basil’s admiration and love for Dorian, saying: “Basil’s love for Dorian is also associated with names prominent in the history of the quasi-homosexuality cult of masculine friendship.” (Raby, 2007, p. xxi )

On the other hand, Basil thinks that art should be unconscious, ideal, and remote, but he shows an extreme degree of self-consciousness. So, his selfish desire and jealousy isolate Dorian from other people, which leads to Dorian’s corruption and isolation. This point becomes clear when Basil says:

And it had all been what art should be—unconscious, ideal, and remote. One day, a fatal day I sometimes think, I determined to paint a wonderful portrait of you as you actually are, not in the costume of dead ages, but in your own dress and in your own time. Whether it was the realism of the method, or the mere wonder of your own personality, thus directly presented to me without mist or veil, I cannot tell. (PDG, p.139).

It is clear that Basil’s work proves the opposite. Gradually, his work becomes too personal and self-conscious. In the beginning, Dorian is an artistic ideal, but eventually he becomes a corrupt man in pursuit of his hedonistic pleasure, which represents the corruption of an artistic ideal. Dorian becomes exposed to Lord Henry’s corrupting influence and turns out to be an egocentric man. As Allan Baker says:

It is important to realize that Dorian is first of all an artistic ideal, and the corruption that he undergoes in his hedonistic pursuit of pleasure is the corruption of an artistic ideal. The fact that Dorian's corruption shows only on Hallward's canvas. Hallward's initial self-consciousness and mishandling of the ideal have doleful consequences, and it is significant that the artist himself introduces Dorian to Lord Henry’s capture .(Baker, 1969, p.355).

Basil plays a major role in Dorian's corruption. It is Basil who first introduces Dorian to Lord Henry as a friend even if he is unwilling to do so. Eventually, Dorian comes under the influence of Lord Henry's curious thoughts. Dorian's decline toward degeneration finds its parallel in his movement from idealism to corruption. On the other hand, Basil is fascinated by Dorian's beauty; in fact, he has been experiencing mysterious feelings for the young man since he first met him. The following extract describes Basil's sensations when he first sees Dorian:

I turned halfway round and saw Dorian Gray for the first time. When our eyes met, I felt that I was growing pale. A curious sensation of terror came over me. I knew that I had come face to face with someone whose mere personality was so fascinating that, if I allowed it to do so, it would absorb my whole nature, my whole soul, my very art itself. (PDG, p.14).

When Lord Henry becomes Dorian's friend, he begins to influence Dorian's thoughts and feelings by imposing on him his philosophy of life. He starts seducing Dorian by praising his youth and advising him to enjoy his youth as much as possible. Thus, he begins to change Dorian's values and gain control over his life, so according to Dorian , Henry becomes a mental guider.

Oscar Wilde believes that art and criticism have an essential role in improving one's personality. So, Wilde believed in changing society, but not in rebelling against it. This is exactly what Lord Henry does through perverted notions of hedonism and individualism. He believes one must live life to the fullest. But he ignores the ideas and feelings of other people. It is clear when Lord Henry start seducing Dorian as he (Henry) says:

"I believe that if one man were to live out his life fully and completely, were to give form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream - I believe that the world would gain such a fresh impulse of joy that we would forget all the maladies of medievalism,



and return to the Hellenic ideal - to something finer, richer, than the Hellenic ideal, it may be. But the bravest man amongst us is afraid of himself. The mutilation of the savage has its tragic survival in the self-denial that mars our lives. We are punished for our refusals. Every impulse that we strive to strangle broods in the mind and poisons us. The body sins once, and has done with its sin, for action is a mode of purification. Nothing remains then but the recollection of a pleasure, or the luxury of a regret. The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden to itself, with desire for what its monstrous laws have made monstrous and unlawful. It has been said that the great events of the world take place in the brain. It is in the brain, and the brain only, that the great sins of the world take place also. " (PDG, p.p30-31).

Lord Henry is trying to make Dorian believe in the value of a life full of pleasure and forget all the diseases of the medieval times. Henry succeeds in convincing Dorian about this notion.

Homosexuality, which is sometimes associated with the "Hellenic ideal"<sup>3</sup>, was declared by the British government to be a "monstrous and unlawful" behavior in the nineteenth century. Thus, Lord Henry urges Dorian to return to the "Hellenic ideal," to the realization of ancient Greece, where the appreciation of beauty dominated.

On the other hand, there is another invitation of homosexuality for Dorian when Lord Henry encourages him not to marry, because he thinks that women are sentimental

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<sup>3</sup> An ancient Greek culture or ideals. Or the characteristics of Greek culture, especially after the time of Alexander the Great; civilization of the Hellenistic period.

and marriage is for disappointed people and he does not want Dorian to be like that, as he (Henry) puts it:

“Never marry woman with straw-coloured hair, Dorian,” He said after a few puffs. “Why, Harry?” “Because they are so sentimental.” “But I like sentimental people.” “Never marry at all, Dorian. Men marry because they are tired; women, because they are curious: both are disappointed.” (PDG, pp.61-62).

Lord Henry rejects marriage and his curious attitude is questioned by people who are seduced by him. From Henry’s perspective, if people are not happy with marriage, what then is the best way of life? Apart from marriage, is there any other kind of relationship that can make people happy? Henry has a simple answer to these questions. He believes in life of pleasure and it only way that makes people happy. Thus, Henry opens the door for inexperienced people like Dorian to indulge in immoral relationships. Lord Henry does not pay much attention to his wife and he doesn’t have any idea about where she is at the moment.

“Not at all”, answered Lord Henry, “not at all my Dear Basil. "You seem to forget that I am married, and the one charm of marriage is that it makes a life of deception absolutely necessary for both parties. I never know where my wife is, and my wife never knows what I am doing. When we meet -- we do meet occasionally, when we dine out together, or go down to the Duke's -- we tell each other the most absurd stories with the most serious faces. My wife is very good at it -- much better, in fact, than I am. She never gets confused over her dates, and I always do. But when she does find me out, she makes no row at all. I sometimes wish she would; but she merely laughs at me." (PDG, pp.14-15).

It is clear that Henry’s relationship with his wife is far from being ideal. His negligent attitude toward his wife opens the way for him to seduce men. Rather than marriage, he

is interested in satisfying his immoral drives. In fact, Henry's perverted life style is a typical example of indulgence in unethical behaviors, which is a particular type of decadence. Also his fondness of persuading others in life of pleasure and corruption plays a key role of diversion many people like Dorian.

Considering Oscar Wilde's homosexual tendencies, one can say that the writer portrays homosexuals characters like Henry and Dorian in order to justify his own lifestyle. Wilde seems to have thought that homosexuality is not a sin but a sign of purified culture. The homoerotic relations between men represent the main framework of the novel. This companionship between men does not disagree with Wilde's aesthetic values. It is clear that an appreciation of youth and beauty was not only essential to culture but was also expressed as a physical relationship between men. Yet, the Victorian society was extremely intolerant toward homosexuality. In the novel, there are strong homosexual implications in the relationships among the three central characters (Dorian, Lord Henry, and Basil Hallward). These three characters challenge the Victorian standards of true male identity. As Ed Cohen puts it,

one of the earliest examples of male homoerotic pornography, whose encoding of sexual practices between men moves athwart those ideologies that sought to naturalize male heterosexuality. Then by analyzing the better-known and yet manifestly straight text *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, I illustrate that even in the absence of explicit homosexual terminology or activity, a text can subvert the normative standards of male same-sex behavior. In considering how these works challenge the hegemonic representations of male homoerotic experience in late Victorian Britain, I suggest how textual depictions of male same-sex experience both reproduce and resist the dominant heterosexual ideologies and practices (Cohen. 1987, p.803).

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* depicts how the male homoerotic desire may turn into perverted behavior. Despite its tragic ending, the story suggests that same-sex eroticism is possible. What is more, it is considered natural. On the other hand, two works often attributed to Oscar Wilde, *Teleny* and *Des Grieux*, involve one of the most articulate efforts on his part to advocate same-sex love. In fact, the principles of homoeroticism presuppose an opposition between male and female, intellect and passion. Similarly, the protagonist of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* becomes a typical example of decadence since he violates the moral principles of Victorian society. As Christine Feruson says:

In the scandalous *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), the young protagonist is freed from social and moral accountability through his representation in Basil Hallward's painting. No longer forced to bear the physical markings of his own compromised soul, Gray indulges in a series of increasingly vile acts that culminate in murder and suicide. (Ferguson, 2002, p.471).

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* narrates the development of male identity within a setting that devastates male behavior of the traditional bourgeois. The novel portrays a comfortable environment free from the restrictions of moral norms. Thus, male friendships gain an emotional dimension, while traditional male values are rejected in favor of decadence and modernism. The theme of decadence has urged many commentators to interpret the novel as the story of a man's struggle with his socially unacceptable inclinations. Viewed from this perspective, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* tells the story of a man that sells his soul for eternal youth. As Dorian Gray comes under the influence of Lord Henry's eloquence, his portrait gradually turns older and uglier. Dorian wishes that the picture would age instead of him so that he could be blessed with eternal youth.

How sad it is!" murmured Dorian Gray with his eyes still fixed upon his own portrait. "How sad it is! 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! If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that—for that—I would give everything! Yes, there is nothing in the whole world I would not give! I would give my soul for that!" (PDG, p.39).

Dorian fears of aging and he hopes to be young as long as he lives. He wants the picture to ages instead of him and he is ready to give anything he has. He sells his soul to be young and the picture ages instead of him. The decadence of his soul has reflected in his picture. He also wants to give his soul to achieve his wishes to stay young as long as he possible.

### **1-3 THE YELLOW BOOK AND ITS INFLUENCE ON DORIAN GRAY**

Lord Henry offers Dorian *The Yellow book*, a decadent French novel that makes him reconsider his whole belief system. The hero of the book lives his life in pursuit of sensual pleasures, which intrigues Dorian. From this moment onwards, Dorian's attitude toward life begins to change. The book influences Dorian's life so deeply that he is diverted from his normal way of life to decadence. After reading this book, Dorian becomes interested in giving free rein to his sensual pleasures. Henry manages to change Dorian's way of looking at the world as well as disrupting his moral values. Dorian finds new ideals in *the yellow book* that he wishes to follow. He finds little difference between himself and the protagonist of the book: that he reads many time.

The hero, the wonderful young Parisian in whom the romantic and the scientific temperaments were so strangely blended, becomes to him a kind of prefiguring type of himself. And in deed, the whole book seemed to him to contain the story of his own life, written before he had lived it. In one point he was more fortunate than the novel's fantastic hero. He never knew—never, indeed, had any cause to know—that somewhat grotesque dread of mirrors, and polished metal surfaces, and still water which came upon the young Parisian so early in his life, and was occasioned by the sudden decay of a beau that had once, apparently, been so remarkable. (PDG, p.153).

The only difference between the protagonist's experiences and his own life is that the Parisian grows old and ugly whereas Dorian remains just as he was on the day the portrait was painted.

Dorian, who used to be an innocent man, begins to see life the way Lord Henry does - as a series of pleasures in which questions of good and evil are irrelevant. After Henry gives the young man the yellow book, Dorian becomes as hedonistic as his wicked mentor, Lord Henry, is. The portrait reflects this transition for the worst in Dorian's soul. In fact, the portrait begins to exhibit the interior corruption of his soul. Dorian lives in a world of decadence and corruption until the end of the novel.

The yellow book represents one of the main poles of decadence that Oscar Wilde portrayed in his novel - making Dorian Gray's personality prone to corruption and degeneration. Lord Henry gives Dorian a copy of the yellow book as a gift. Wilde describes the book as a French novel that plans the hideous experiences of its protagonist as a pleasure-seeker. Dorian buys a dozen copies of the book and shapes his life and actions around it. The book becomes like a holy guide to Dorian as the narrator points out:

...for years, Dorian Gray could not free himself from the influence of this book. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say

that he never sought to free himself from it. He procured from Paris no less than nine large-paper copies of the first edition, and had them bound in different colours, so that they might suit his various moods and the changing fancies of a nature over which he seemed, at times, to have almost entirely lost control. The hero, the wonderful young Parisian in whom the romantic and the scientific temperaments were so strangely blended, became to him a kind of prefiguring type of himself. And, indeed, the whole book seemed to him to contain the story of his own life, written before he had lived it. (PDG, p.153).

Dorian's mind has been poisoned by the ideas presented in the yellow book. Once Dorian comes under the influence of the book, he can hardly be cured from it. In fact, he has been captured both by Henry's poisonous thoughts and by *the Yellow book's* influence. Dorian can hardly free himself from these thoughts.

The yellow book represents the deep influence of art on individuals. Art has the power to affect and control naïve people. The book serves as a warning to those who would willingly surrender themselves to such an influence. Henry himself confesses that he is responsible for Dorian's diversion and corruption. As Paulo Augusto says:

“Lord Henry is satisfied at the fact that he is the one responsible for turning Dorian into the ideal of his age. However, the ideal represented by Dorian Gray can be seen to be the evil side of man stirred by the passions and made more dangerous by the very thing society depends on, reason. The “strange panegyric on youth”( PDG,P) through which Lord Henry gains Dorian's should values the individual above everything, and sees in laws an impediment to the full realization of one's self”( Augusto, 2012, pp.4-5).

It is clear that Lord Henry Wotton embodies the devil and impersonated him. Lord Henry is called "Harry", or "old Harry", this word is a synonym for the devil. It is a

clear aspect of decadence, especially when he uses the actions of devil to seduce his fellows. Lord Henry is a wicked, malicious man, he uses his wisdom to seduce Dorian and to spoil him with his new hedonism and his immoral opinions. By giving Dorian *the yellow book*, he make him loss his "natural" as an innocence and makes him a murderer. Also he was a libertine and has an inaccurate thoughts. By reading the "Yellow Book", Dorian didn't care about sins or any scene of violence, but it clearly appears in the shape of his portrait. The beautiful portrait has changed, so there are a new scars and body faults with each of Dorian's villainous actions. As time pass, the Dorian's portrait grows more ugly and hideous. As Dorian himself stays unnaturally young, beautiful and invariable. Many scandals and rumors begin to spread about the many people whose lives has ruined by Dorian, and his previously good reputation has destroyed.

Besides *The Yellow Book*, Lord Henry gives Dorian another important novel of decadence, *À Rebours* ("Against Nature") written by Joris-Karl Huysman's. The wealthy protagonist of this novel devotes his life to seeking aesthetic sensations, regardless of what society says. Dorian is fascinated by the book because its protagonist, a young, wealthy, passionate man like himself, seeks to realize his passions with a combination of both romantic and scientific temperaments.

#### **1-4 DORIAN'S DARK LOVE FOR SYBIL VANE:**

Sybil's death is the first and best example of Dorian's evil side, which is a combination of passions and perverse intellect. Dorian reprimands Sybil angrily on the stage because she does not act well. In fact, it is a trivial reason to humiliate her. Actually, Dorian has never loved Sybil, for he is not ready to sacrifice himself for her. What he calls love is nothing but infatuation. What Dorian likes about Sybil is her acting on stage. This means that Dorian's love is far from being a true love. As Hope Kidd puts it:



In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian Gray and Sibyl Vane, because of their confusion between life and art, base their feelings for each other on non-reality; and when they are faced with reality, they are unable to handle it. Dorian first speaks of his love for Sibyl when talking to Lord Henry Wotton on the subject of marriage. When Henry asks with whom he is in love, Dorian replies "With an actress"(PGD, p62). Here is the first hint that Dorian's shallow love is not based on reality. Instead of telling Henry the woman's name first, he says that she is an actress, as if that were her entire identity.( Kidd, 2003, p.2).

Eventually, Dorian and Lord Henry find that there is nothing interesting about Sybil's character and her family background. They realize that her artistic talents and her knowledge of the world are rather limited. So, Dorian quits her once and for all. Ironically enough, just as Dorian is about to return to her and apologize to her for his terrible words, Sybil commits suicide. When he goes back home, Dorian notices some changes in his own portrait. The expression on his face has become crueler. At the beginning, when he hears about Sybil's suicide, he gets shocked and feels terrible. But after a while, his mood changes as Lord Henry consoles him to calm down, and Dorian does what his mentor has told him. Dorian's flaw is that he concerned himself only with Sybil's physical appearance and art, and he ignored the personality of the girl, which is a reflection of his decadence. On one occasion, Dorian talks with Henry about the subject of Sybil's character at the dinner table :

Well, I can't help going to see Sibyl play, "he (Dorian) cried," even if it is only for a single act. I get hungry for her presence; and when I think of the wonderful soul that is hidden away in that little ivory, I am filled with woe."

(Lord Henry):"You can dine with me to-night, Dorian, can't you?"

He (Dorian) shook his head. "To-night she is Imogen," he answered, "and to-morrow night she will be Juliet."

(Lord Henry): "When is she Sibyl Vane?"

(Dorian): "Never."

(Lord Henry): "I congratulate you.(PDG, p. 70).

In Dorian Gray's way of looking at the world is a combination of the physical and spiritual, which finds expression in the new hedonism visualized by Lord Henry. The search for pleasure can be interpreted as a reflection of decadence, which stands in sharp contrast to the established norms of society. In fact, Dorian believes in Lord Henry's conviction that our lives must be set free from the harsh restrictions of puritanism and Victorian norms:

Yes: there was to be, as Lord Henry had prophesied, a new Hedonism that was to recreate life and to save it from that harsh uncomely puritanism that is having, in our own day, its curious revival. It was to have its service of the intellect, certainly, yet it was never to accept any theory or system that would involve the sacrifice of any mode of passionate experience. Its aim, indeed, was to be experience itself, and not the fruits of experience, sweet or bitter as they might be. Of the asceticism that deadens the senses, as of the vulgar profligacy that dulls them, it was to know nothing. But it was to teach man to concentrate himself upon the moments of a life that is itself but a moment. (PDG, p.157).

After Sybil's death and his magical change, he start living in an isolation and from that moment he start visiting the opium dens to forget his past memory which represents the gloomy scene of Dorian's life.

## 1-5 THE OPIUM DEN

After murdering Basil, Dorian flees to the opium dens located in a remote and abandoned part of London. The dens represent the depraved state of Dorian's mind. Dorian flees to the dens at a crucial moment because he wants to forget about his horrible crimes. As Terry M. Parssinen points out, "The scene in the opium den is critical to the novel's plot. The den is a sordid representation of Dorian Gray's dark nature. He seeks it out, expecting to find refuge, but instead find reminders of his past, which intensify his suffering, and nearly cost his life." (Parssinen, 1983, p.66 ). Dorian uses all ways to cure his sorrow past, but even in the Opium dens he learns that there will be no escape. So Dorian has done what Lord Henry recommended him in order to cure his soul by sensation. This is Lord Henry's a devise for Dorian at the beginning, when he first meet him. Dorian is looking for dark and desolate places where he will totally lose his consciousness:

"To cure the soul by means of the senses, and the senses by means of the soul." Yes, that was the secret. He had often tried it, and would try it again now. There were opium dens where one could buy oblivion, dens of horror where the memory of old sins could be destroyed by the madness of sins that were new (PDG, p. 215).

The opium den which used by Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is typically a genre that flourished in late Victorian novels and tales. As well as, through travelling in disguise dark and gloomy streets to a secluded lair, Dorian finds exciting adventure within the famous city that makes him away from his sins. In this part, James F. Wurtz says:

The opium den has provided Dorian no protection from his past, but instead has only thrown his circumstances into grater relief. The memories Dorian wishes to escape from remind him of his implication within the structure of capitalism in the form of the devil's bargain and they continually re-enact the various crimes he has committed, the sexual transgressions he has partaken in, but the attempt to erase memory is not simply an escape from the devil's bargain, it is an attempt as well to destroy the conditions of existence for the alternative to the progressive historical narrative which, according to David Lloyd, arises out of capitalism.(Wurtz, 2005, p.61).

According to this critic's idea, the opium den is not perfectly protecting Dorian from his past, but the opium den is a type of relief for Dorian's soul and to escape from his implication with in the structure of capitalism in the form of the devil's bargain.

The opium den in Oscar Wilde's novel is typically a genre that flourished in late Victorian novels and tales. Wilde, like many other gothic writers, describes how a gentleman finds excitement and adventure within dark and gloomy streets in isolated places. Dorian has a jar of opium in his home; but he does not feel satisfied with it. So, he leaves his house to travel to the dark and opium dens, which represent the degeneration in Dorian's soul. Also, he becomes a drug addict, visits the brothels of prostitutes, and spends most of his nights drunken.

Dorian starts gathering beautiful works of art, they gathered from many distant place, which is a clear reflection of decadence in the novel. As James F. Wurtz says,

One of the most obvious scenes of decadence in the novel is chapter 11, where Dorians taste for learning of and collecting the delicately beautiful or rare works of art and opulence is discussed. The description of the various works of art from around the globe attest to the primacy of the ornamentation." For example, "he sought to

accumulate the most exquisite specimens he could find of textile and embroidered work, getting the dainty Delhi muslins, finely wrought with gold-thread palmates, and stitched over with iridescent beetles' wings. (Wurtz, 2005, p.64).

The beautiful works of art Dorian is fond of collecting have the same function as opium and desolates places do: they help him forget about his corrupted past. The various works of art from around the globe bear testimony to the fact that Dorian attaches excessive value to ornamentation. He enjoys accumulating the most wonderful specimens of textile and embroidered works:

And so, for a whole year, he sought to accumulate the most exquisite specimens he could find of textile and embroidered work, getting the dainty Delhi muslins, finely wrought with gold-thread palmates, and stitched over with iridescent beetles' wings; the Dacca gauzes, that from their transparency are known in the East as 'woven air' and 'running water' and 'evening dew'; strange figured cloths from Java; elaborate yellow Chinese hangings; books bound in tawny satins or fair blue silks and wrought with fleurs de lis, birds and images veils of lacinis worked in Hungary point; Sicilian brocades and stiff Spanish velvets; Georgian work, with its gilt coins, and Japanese Foukousas, with their green toned golds and their marvelously plumaged birds. (PDG, p.166).

The works of art Dorian gathers help him cut his ties off his past. They also reveal how he refashioned the world according to his new pleasures. Decadents value things and people not for what they really are, but for what they appear to be. Behind Dorian's appreciation of Sybil is the decadent love of art and artifice.

Lord Henry comments on the differences in morality between the upper and lower classes. He tries to prove his notion when he says that morality and ethics are just nonsense. To quote Lord Henry:

I suppose it comes from the fact that none of us can stand other people having the same faults as ourselves I quite sympathize with the rage of the English democracy against what they call the vices of the upper orders. The masses feel that drunkenness, stupidity, and immorality should be their own special property, and that if any one of us makes an ass of himself, he is poaching on their preserves. When poor Southwark got into the divorce court, their indignation was quite magnificent. And yet I don't suppose that ten per cent of the proletariat live correctly. (PDG, p.19).

Oscar Wilde creates a double setting for a double life. Dorian moves freely between two major parts of London. The two settings represent Dorian's two sides. Dorian establishes his home, visits various gentlemen's clubs, theatres, and symphony halls. Eventually, he becomes a much-admired gentleman, fashionable figure, cultivated aristocrat and a famous local figure who has become a subject of gossip in society. What is more, he becomes a decadent man who lives like an evil ghost in the desolate corners of the Opium den.

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde represents his identity in his characters (Dorian Gray and Lord Henry), as Arthur H, Nethercot puts it:

Oscar Wilde is to some extent portraying his own life. In the second half of *Dorian Gray* ( during which Lord Henry gets a divorce, as Wilde never bothered to do). Wilde transfers his identity to Dorian. Dorian too apes all the graceful though to him only half serious, fopperies, of the dandy-neckties, cans, jewels, flowers, and all the rest. Yet he has his more serious side. (Nethercot, 1944, P.78).

The term “decadence” implies an admiration for the artificial as opposed to the natural. While Dorian indulges in acts of decadence, he behaves with a sheer indifference to intellectual, moral, and social values. His decadence is clearly manifested in his actions during his journey through experiences that involve pleasure, sin, regret, and ultimately, death.

To conclude, decadence is one of the dominant themes in the novel. Decadence is clearly manifested in Dorian’s indulgence in hedonistic behaviors, homosexual tendencies of the main characters (Dorian and Lord Henry, and to a certain extent Basil), *The Yellow Book*’s influence on Dorian’s lifestyle and how it leads Dorian to diversion and corruption, and the opium dens and their negative influence on Dorian’s reputation and behaviors.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2-1 THE THEME OF HORROR IN *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY*:

This chapter will discuss the element of horror in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The first scene of horror is the dramatic change that occurs in the picture from the beautiful to the ugly, which is a grotesque situation in itself. The second terror scene involves the terrible murders and death in the novel. The third one is characterized by the desolate areas and the opium den, where Dorian is faced with horrifying situations and events. In fact, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* includes elements of horror similar to the ones found in classic horror stories such as *Dracula*, *Frankenstein* and others. Finally, these terror actions in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* lead to a dramatic ending. Though the horror element in the story is, to some extent, subdued, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is one of the most horrific tales ever told.

Horror literature or horror fiction is a literary genre that aims to frighten its readers by inducing feelings of fear and horror, while at the same time startling them. Besides, horror genre often involves supernatural elements. Historically, horror always originates from the intrusion of an evil, ghost, and supernatural element into everyday human experience. Horror fiction usually includes elements of science fiction or fantasy. One of the known traits of the genre is that it provokes readers and arouses an emotional, psychological or physical response from readers and listeners, who often react to the horror scene with fear. Horror tales can cause shrinkage or destruction to others and



result in uncontrollable fear and horror. For this reason, H. P. Lovecraft calls the Gothic literature "the literature of fear". To quote Lovecraft:

No one wonder at the existence of literature of cosmic fear, no better evidence of its tenacious vigor can be cited than the impulse which now and then drives writers of totally opposite leanings to try their hands at it in the isolated tales, as if to discharge from their minds certain phantasmal shapes which would otherwise haunt them". (Lovecraft, 2013, p.4).

In addition, Lovecraft asserts that the oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and he concentrates on some types of fear such as the fear of unknown, and of supernaturalism. On the other hand, Mario Praz combines horror and joy when he argues that horror is a source of delight and beauty. As he points out, "Beauty was enhanced by exactly those qualities which seem to deny it, by those objects which produce horror; the sadder, the more painful it was, the more intensely they relished it" (Praz, 1954, p.27).

Additionally, there is a monster literature which is a literary genre that combines good and evil, and aims to evoke a horror sensation and terror by presenting the evil side of a particular character in the form of a monster. The themes and concepts of Monster Literature go back to the eighteenth century Gothic literature. The earliest examples of Gothic literature can be seen in the work of English author Horace Walpole's novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). The novel is regarded as the first Gothic horror novel that incorporates elements of the supernatural instead of pure realism. However, monster literature first emerged in the nineteenth century with the publication of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). Gothic literature includes elements of horror and terror as well as the predicament of a victim who cannot stand against his enemy or victimizer, who usually possesses some form of supernatural power or authority over the victim.

In the twentieth century, Tod Robbins, an American writer who specialized in horror fiction, wrote novels and stories dealing with the theme of madness and cruelty.

Tod Robbins wrote two collections of short stories and several novels containing bizarre and frightening plots. On the other hand, H. P. Lovecraft is one of the authors of the early twentieth century who deeply explored the genre of *cosmic horror*<sup>4</sup>. Finally, M. R. James is an English author, who is best remembered for his ghost stories that are considered to be the best among the other stories in this genre. Among the author's best stories written in this genre are *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (1904), *More Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (1911), and *A Thin Ghost and Others* (1919).

Another well-known contemporary horror writer is the American author Stephen King, who is known for his works *Carrie*, *The Shining*, and *Misery*. *Carrie* is an American epistolary novel that published in 1974. It is about a shy high school girl with an ugly shape, who uses her newly discovered superhuman powers to take revenge on those who torment her. In fact, *Carrie* causes one of the worst local disasters in the history of American fiction.

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* definitely falls into the category of horror novels, even if it is often described as Gothic, philosophical, romantic, comedic, and even a long article about aestheticism. At the time of its publication, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was definitely shocking and revolting against the Victorian morals of the time. The immoral acts of the characters in the novel, especially their interest in seeking pleasure, was an abuse against the values of Victorian society. Although the story includes an element of humor, there is an unmistakable undertone of menace, terror, and despair that dominates the novel. For example, Dorian's fear of aging and death, one of humanity's most universal fears, contributes to creating an atmosphere of horror in the novel. The theme of horror is clearly seen in several situations and incidents in the novel. While decadence is the controlling theme in the story, the element of horror holds an important place in the novel. As George Edgar Slusser says,

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<sup>4</sup> Cosmicism is the literary philosophy developed and used by the American writer H. P. Lovecraft in his weird fiction. Lovecraft is philosophically used an intense horror stories that involve mysterious phenomena like astral possession and alien miscegenation.

An important prototype of the decadent horror story, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* treats thematically a number of ideas that influenced the stylistic and aesthetic choices made in later, and more sophisticated, works of decadent horror literature. In spite of the fact that it was one of the first stories to broach the subject of cultural decadence and its attendant stylistic analogue, however, Wilde's portrait is not the quintessential decadent horror story that critics have generally taken it to be. It does, of course, possess many of the earmarks of the genre. It gives a decadent treatment to a traditional supernatural theme or motifs-in this case, the motif of doppelgänger that arises as the spectral, subconscious other in such early supernatural fiction". (Slusser , 1992, p.96).

Oscar Wilde's use of the motif of doppelgänger (double of a living person, sometimes portrayed as a paranormal phenomenon) is clearly seen in Dorian himself. As Anna Budziak puts it, "Oscar Wilde uses the theme of doppelgänger, it appears as a conventional theme of double life" ( Budziak, 2008, p. 292 ). At the beginning, Dorian is a kind, innocent, and pure man; but then he dramatically becomes transformed into a man of corruption and decadence. The portrait, which is Dorian's second self that haunts him throughout the novel, represents the two halves of his identity – one being his innocent and good side, and the other, the corrupted and wicked side of his character.

## **2-2 ACTS OF HORROR IN DESOLATE PLACES AND THE OPIUM DEN**

After murdering Basil, Dorian feels overpowered by feelings of fear, terror and rage. Suddenly, he loses power over his actions as the dark side of his nature begins to control him. He feels like a monster without any human compassion. Dorian wanders

around London, in the fringes of the city. The desolate areas he walks through are described as dens for all kinds of wicked creatures:

Dorian remembered wandering through dimly lit streets, past gaunt, black-shadowed archways and evil-looking houses. Women with hoarse voices and harsh laughter had called after him. Drunkards had reeled by, cursing and chattering to themselves like monsters apes. He had seen grotesque children huddled upon door-steps, and heard shrieks and oaths from gloomy courts... As the dawn was just breaking, he found himself close to Covent Garden. The darkness lifted, and, flushed with faint fires, the sky hollowed itself into a perfect pearl. Huge carts filled with nodding lilies rumbled slowly down the polished empty street. The air was heavy with the perfume of the flowers, and their beauty seemed to bring him an anodyne for his pain. ( DGP, p.109).

On the other hand, dark and desolate places are usually associated with the traditional terror gothic. As Jose Manuel Correoso Rodenas point out:

“ Another element taken from gothic tradition is the opposition between spaces: the terror appears when the character is alone and, especially, when he or she is in a particular place. In Dorian’s case, this place is his own house, and it goes on as the action is being transferred to the room where the painting is. This use of the spaces as the element which constructs the terrific atmosphere has been used since the first gothic works, preferring dark and narrow place in order to be able to maintain the tension up”. (Rodenas, pp.46-47).

Dorian’s house, where the portrait is kept, becomes a center of terror in the novel. The house is also a gloomy and mysterious place where the terror builds up day by day. Dorian stays in the house to protect his portrait because he does not want anyone to see it. He thinks that if anyone happens to see the terrible change that has

occurred in the portrait, his life will be ruined because people will learn the secret of his own soul.

In the opium den, Dorian is faced with the danger of being assassinated by James Vane, who tries to kill Dorian because he thinks Dorian murdered his sister eighteen years ago. Before James set on a travel abroad, he warned Dorian not to do any harm to Sybil. James told Dorian that he would kill him if he left her. But when he returned from his Journey, James found that Dorian had ruined his sisters' life; she had committed suicide because of her love for him. As James puts the pistol to Dorian's head, threatening to kill him, Dorian, filled with fear, tries to dissuade James from doing so. James captures Dorian in a desolate place in London. As the narrator puts it,

Dorian Gray hastened on, quacking his steps as he went, but as he darted aside in to a dim archway, that had served him often as a short cut to the ill-famed place where he was going, he felt himself suddenly seized from behind, and before he had time to defend himself, he was thrust back against the wall with a brutal hand round his throat. He struggled madly for life, and by a terrible effort wrenched the tightening fingers away. In a second he heard the click of a revolver, and saw the gleam of a polished barrel, pointing straight at his head, and the dusky form of a short, thick-set man facing him.”( DGP, p.221).

Now, James Vane is intent on taking vengeance on Dorian, But Dorian pretends that he does not know her. As the narrator puts it, “Dorian Gray grew sick with fear.” “I never knew her”, he stammered. “ I never heard of her, you are mad.” (DGP, p.222). But James asks Dorian not to move up; or else he will shoot him. Dorian is now in a critical situation because he does not know what to say. Dorian tries to find out some way to get out of this terrible situation. In that instant, a brilliant idea comes to his mind; where he can survive himself, and he asks James:

“How long ago is it since your sister died? Quick tell me!” eighteen years ago. Said James. “Why do you ask me? What do years matter?” Eighteen years,” laughed Dorian Gray, with a touch of triumph in his voice. “Eighteen years! Set me under the lamp and look at my face!” (DGP, p.222).

Dorian asks James to look at his face at the light. By so doing, Dorian manages to convince James that he is not the person who James has been looking for. Dorian says that the act of suicide occurred eighteen years ago, and that in fact he is still very young. James becomes fully convinced that Dorian cannot be held responsible for his sister’s suicide, and therefore apologizes to Dorian for his failure to understand the reality:

“He (James) loosened his and reeled back, “My God! My God!” he cried, “ and I would have murdered you!” Dorian Gray drew a long breath. “ you have been on the brink of committing a terrible crime” My man,” he said, looking at him sternly. “Let this be a warning to you not to take vengeance in to your own hands.” “Forgive me, sir,” muttered James Vane. “I was deceived. A chance word I heard in that damned den set me on the wrong track. (DGP, p.223).

Dorian tells James that he does not know Sybil. He says that the incident must have happened many years ago, and that the person who killed her must be old now. Upon this revelation, James releases Dorian. But even though Dorian has been set free, he is still afraid of the possibility that James may return later to kill him. When Dorian is at home, he feels very anxious because he is afraid that James may come back again to take vengeance. James can easily recognize Dorian’s shadow when he is walking inside the house.

“He (Dorian) went to his room and dressed. There was a wild recklessness of gaiety in his manner as he sat at table, but now and then a thrill of terror ran through him when he remembered that,

pressed against the window of the conservatory, like a white handkerchief, he had seen the face of James Vane watching him.” (DGP, p.231).

But one winter morning, Dorian goes to a hunting party to the forest with Lady Monmouth and some other men. Dorian walks to the edge of the forest where the men were shooting at birds and small animals. Suddenly, one of the men shoot at the tree near them to hunt the rabbits. At that moment, they hear two cries – an animal’s and a man’s cry at the same time. Then, they pull the man’s body from the tree. When Dorian sees the corpse, he turns away in horror. As it turns out, the dead body belongs to James Vane. The feeling horror Dorian has initially experienced turns into a cry of joy breaking from his lips. James’s death means that Dorian will be safe and free for ever.

### **2-3 THE HORROR OF THE SUPERNATURAL CHANGES THAT OCCUR IN THE PICTURE AND THE TERRIBLE MURDERS IN THE NOVEL**

All the terror actions in the novel are connected with Dorian, who tries to come up with a solution to the problem of aging. Like Dorian, the protagonist of an earlier Gothic novel seeks to find out a way to avoid aging. In *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), written by Charles Maturin, John Melmoth makes a treaty with the devil and he is allowed to live for 150 years without aging. But at the end of the novel he suddenly ages and dies, just as Dorian Gray does. Dorian envies the figure in the painting and he sells his soul to remain young like his image in the picture, thus staying young forever. Influenced by Lord Henry's thoughts about youth and beauty, Dorian is terrified of aging. He is terribly afraid that if he loses his good looks, he will lose everything he has in life:

"How sad it is!" murmured Dorian Gray with his eyes still fixed upon his own portrait. "How sad it is! 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! If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that—for that—I would give everything! Yes, there is nothing in the whole world I would not give! I would give my soul for that! "You would hardly care for such an arrangement, Basil," cried Lord Henry, laughing. "It would be rather hard lines on your work." (DGP, p.39).

Dorian blindly vows that he will kill himself when he grows old. Also, he wishes that the portrait would age while he stays young. Magically, the picture ages instead of him and takes on all the burden of the debauchery that Dorian Gray has committed in his life. Dorian's immorality is reflected in the painting. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a gothic tale that includes horror scenes and supernatural elements at the same time. The supernatural elements reinforce the plot, which is based on horror. The changes that occur in the picture reflect Dorian's nature, the hidden corruption of his soul, and there is no rational explanation for how this change takes place. Jose Manuel Correoso Rodenas says:

The most terrible thing ever created is going to be hidden by one of the most beautiful pieces of art able to be described. Again, the idea of the evil hidden under a patina of attractiveness appears here in this picture. The changes produced in the portrait are, maybe, the most significant Gothic element present in in the novel: they show Dorian's sins and corruption. The first change takes place after Dorian leaves Sybil, perhaps as a sign pointing to the fact that the painting already knows the actress's fate and the role dorian has played on it"( Rodenas, 2013, pp.45-46 ).

The mysterious changes that occur in the picture are a reflection of the horror that dominates the story. Whenever Dorian notices that unnatural changes occur in the picture, he is overpowered by a feeling of horror. Also, whenever he indulges in acts of



decadence and committing sins, the picture comes under the influence of a supernatural power that causes it to undergo a magical change. Dorian's cruelty to Sybil reflects on the shape of portrait as the narrator puts it:

“Dorian got up from his chair and drew a large screen right in front of the portrait, shuddering as he glanced at it. 'How horrible! !' he murmured to himself, and he walked across to the window and opened it.” (DGP, p.113).

Whenever Dorian treats Sybil unjustly, the shape of the picture suddenly changes in a magical way. When he looks at the picture, Dorian feels shocked and horrified. He also begins to speak with himself in a terrified manner to describe the horrifying picture in front of him.

The sudden eruption of violence and horror in the murder of Basil is another Gothic element. Basil is murdered secretly. During the process of murdering Basil, two acts of terror happen: the first one is before killing Basil when Basil first sees the picture in the isolated upstairs room. Basil gets shocked as he sees the ugly shape of the portrait.

“An exclamation of horror broke from the painter's lip as he saw in the dim light the hideous face on the canvas grinning at him. There was something in its expression that filled him with disgust and loathing. Good heavens! It was Dorian Grays' own face that he was hooking at! The horror, whatever it was, had not yet entirely spoiled that marvelous beauty. There was still some gold in the thinning hair and some scarlet on the sensual mouth. The sodden eyes had kept something of the loveliness of their blue, the noble curves had not yet completely passed away from chiselled nostrils and from plastic throat.” (DGP, p.184).

As Basil brings the candle near the picture to make sure that it is his work, he becomes convinced that it is really the picture he made. And he becomes overpowered by a terrible feeling. As the narrator puts it:

“Yes, it was Dorian himself, but who had done it? He seemed to recognize his own brush-work, and the frame was his own design. The idea was monstrous, yet he felt afraid. He seized the light candle, and held it to the picture. In the left-hand corner was his own name, traced in long letters of bright vermillion.” (DGP, p.184).

Basil is so puzzled that he asks himself “Why had it altered? He turned and looked at Dorian Gray with the eyes of a sick man.” (DGP, p.184). Caught in a feeling of terror, Basil is sure that the picture reflects the corruption of Dorian’s soul by its magical changing.

The second act of terror occurs after Dorian kills Basil, when Basil visits Dorian before he leaves for Paris. Basil has a strange habit of disappearing without telling people anything about his destination. This makes it easier for Dorian to cover up his crime. After Basil’s death, Dorian tries to find out some way to get rid of the victim’s dead body. Dorian asks an old friend of his, a chemist, to remove the corpse from the house as soon as possible. His friend secretly comes in, pick up the corpse, and takes it away to an unknown place. Every time he looks at his friend’s dead body, Dorian gets filled with horror:

“He couldn’t help seeing the dead thing. How still it was! How horrible white the long hands looked! It was like a dreadful wax image. Having looked the door behind him, he crept quietly down stairs. The wood work creaked and seemed to cry out as if in pain. He stopped several times and waited. No: everything was still. It was merely the sound of his own footsteps.” ( DGP, pp.188-189).

Then, Dorian decides to hide everything that belongs to Basil. He returns to the library and hides Basil's bag and coat in a secret locker where he keeps his goods. He reassures himself that there is no reason to panic over the situation in hand. He tries to master his thoughts and feelings. However, he cannot help thinking that many men have been

hanged up for what he has just done. Once again, he tries to comfort himself thinking that there is little evidence against him.

Dorian feels no regret for the murder he committed and he quickly thinks of a plan to hide his crime. Silently he leaves the house, taking care to avoid the notice of a policeman on the street. The streets of the city are dark and empty. With a feeling of horror, Dorian returns home at ten past two in the morning. He asks if anyone came to his house in his absence. Francis says "Mr. Basil Hallward stayed until eleven, and then he went away to catch his train." (DGP, p.190). Francis tells Dorian the accurate time of Basil's leaving, Dorian asks about Basil to pretend that he does not know anything about him. Dorian's fear that his crime might be discovered is clearly revealed as he walks up and down the room in the library, biting his lips and thinking.

In the end, Dorian thinks that the picture will return to its normal shape if he is able to regain his integrity. He decides to live a better life hoping to be a straight man: "Dorian had spared one innocent thing, at any rate. He would never again tempt innocence. He would be good"(DGP, p.259). But as he runs upstairs to the locked room, Dorian hopes that from now on his picture will look better, and that he will not need to worry about his soul again. But when he uncovers the picture, he cannot help crying because the face in the picture is still the same as before. It is still very terrible and looks more hateful than before. The red blood on the hand seems brighter and feels still hot. He looks at the picture with hate and he feels overpowered by a deep sense of fear, which is clearly seen in his eyes. Dorian cannot take his eyes off the picture :

"He took the lamp from the table and crept upstairs. As he unbarred the door, a smile of joy flitted across his strangely young-looking face and lingered for a moment about his lips. Yes, he would be good, and the hideous thing that he had hidden away would no longer be a terror to him. He felt as if the load had been lifted from him already. He went in quietly, locking the door behind him, as was his custom, and dragged the purple hanging from the portrait. A cry of pain and indignation broke from him. He could see no change, save that in the

eyes there was a look of cunning and in the mouth the curved wrinkle of the hypocrite. The thing was still loathsome—more loathsome, if possible, than before—and the scarlet dew that spotted the hand seemed brighter, and more like blood newly spilled.( DGP, p.259).

When he finds that the picture has remained unchanged, Dorian becomes disappointed. Now, he is sure that the picture has robbed him of every chance of peace or happiness. Because the picture reflects terror, melancholy and sadness, Dorian immediately decides to destroy it and to forget all memories of his sorrow that he was suffering from, as the narrator puts it,

There was only one bit of evidence left against him. The picture itself—that was evidence. He would destroy it. Why had he kept it so long? Once it had given him pleasure to watch it changing and growing old. Of late he had felt no such pleasure. It had kept him awake at night. When he had been away, he had been filled with terror lest other eyes should look upon it. It had brought melancholy across his passions. Its mere memory had marred many moments of joy. It had been like conscience to him. Yes, it had been conscience. He would destroy it.( DGP, p.261).

At the beginning, Dorian feels happy with the picture though the image is gradually growing old. But later, he starts feeling sad and fearful as the picture becomes uglier. It becomes a source of terror and melancholy in his life. Then, Dorian decides to destroy the picture since he feels that it reflects the decadence of his own soul. Inside the room, Dorian looks round and sees the knife that he used to kill Basil Halward and thinks aloud: “As it had killed the painter, so it would kill the painter's work, and all that meant. It would kill the past, and when that was dead, he would be free. (DGP, p.261). Dorian thinks that if he destroys the portrait, he will be able to get rid of his painful past. Also, he will be freed from pain and sorrow. Finally, he tears the picture into pieces to face his tragic end.

The last scene of supernatural terror occurs at the end of the book when Dorian stabs the painting and the servants hear his horrible cry in his upstairs desolated room where the picture was keeping:

There was a cry heard, and a crash, a cry so horrible in its agony that frightened servants woke and crept out of their rooms. Two gentlemen, who were passing in the square below, stopped and looked up at the great house. They walked on till they met a policeman and brought him back. The man rang the bell several times, but there was no answer. Except the light in one of the top windows, the house was all dark. (DGP, p.261).

Dorian's servants and the two gentlemen go upstairs and get close to the room. They knock the door, but they cannot get any reply from inside the room. They call again, but no sound is heard. So, they climb down from the roof and get into the room through the window. When they open the door, they see the most horrible scene in the novel: Dorian's dead body is lying on the floor with a knife in his heart and his blood shatters on the ground.

“When they entered, they found hanging upon the wall a splendid portrait of their master as they had last seen him, in all the wonder of his exquisite youth and beauty. Lying on the floor was a dead man, in evening dress, with a knife in his heart. He was withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage. It was not till they had examined the rings that they recognized who it was. ( DGP, p.262).

In this scene, a supernatural transformation occurs - the picture has been magically repaired and restored to its original shape. Ironically, Dorian's dead body has been mysteriously transformed into an old, ugly and terrible thing. The corpse looks old, withered, wrinkled and loathsome, which reflects the horror theme that dominates the novel, mixed with supernatural elements.

This chapter includes the acts of horror throughout the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The first part of the chapter mentions the history of horror, and the most important horror works in literature and specifically in Gothic genre. Then, this chapter details the most important acts of horror in *the Picture of Dorian Gray* such as, acts of horror in desolates places and the opium den, The horror of the picture's supernatural physical changes and the acts of horror during committing terrible murders.

## CHAPTER THIRTEE

### 3-1 VIOLENCE IN GOTHIC LITERATURE

The theme of violence represents one of the elements of Gothic fiction. Various forms of violence such as murder, suicide and death are commonly found in Gothic fiction. As a matter of fact, Gothic literature is dominated by death – for example, unnatural deaths, and a series of deaths as in *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley. Death always creates an atmosphere of horror, supernatural, and blood. The vampires support the death theme in Gothic literature, as in the vampire hunters in *Dracula*. There is also the metaphor of the dead who return to life as in Edgar Allan Poe's short story *Ligeia*. Moreover, there is also a Gothic obsession with the bodies of dead women. As Babette Lippmann points out, "Edgar Allan Poe said that the death of a beautiful woman is the most poetical topic in the world. When it most closely allies itself to Beauty: the death then of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world, and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover" (Lippmann, 2005, p.22). Additionally, in the novel *Wuthering Heights*, the digging of Catherine's grave suggests other kinds of transgressions. Blood is commonly used in horror and violence literature as a horrible representation of massacre.

Violence is portrayed in literature in many ways such as wars, murders, and crimes. In early literary works, war is the main scene of collective violence. Homer (eighth century BC) wrote a cycle of poems on the Trojan War, in the *Illiad* and *Odyssey*. Another type of violence in literature is institutional violence. This theme was first seen in the nineteenth century in the works of French writers like Victor Hugo and Alexander Dumas, whose novels showed the violence of the justice system and the damage caused to population. Later, the theme of institutional violence was treated by the Russian writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who described the violence of the

totalitarian regime and its gulags (the system of forced-labor camps in the Soviet Union). The Russian novel *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, is a typical example of this genre. In this novel, the protagonist kills his greedy landlady, which represents the main act of violence in the novel. Rape is another type of violence that can be regarded as a combination of both individual and institutional violence.

In English literature, the works of William Shakespeare include various stories of violence, with an act of murder at the center of works like *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. Murder is a theme commonly treated by various writers. Written in the mid-eighteenth century, the earlier works of Edgar Allan Poe are examples of crime fiction; among them can be cited short stories such as *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841), *The Mystery of Marie Roget* (1842), and *The Purloined Letter* (1844). Among the major English authors of the twentieth century are Conan-Doyle, Raymond Chandler, Agatha Christie, Doris May Lessing, and Ed McBain. These writers are well known for their works involving violence and crime. They often portray detective characters who try to solve the mystery of a crime. As well as In the twentieth century, the violence and crimes genre became more popular than fiction, “There was abundance in books or novels that took crime, violence, persecution, or sexual abuse as their principal subjects. Hence, thrillers, detective stories, books of adventures or travel stories sold well ” (Arif, 2009 , p.34).

The Gothic genre has always been closely associated with the theme of violence, which is an important component of the Gothic. Many Gothic authors used violence (death, murder, and crimes) in their literary works. In fact, the element of violence can be found in the first Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto* 1764 by Walpole. In this novel, the theme of death is related to the Gothic nature of this work. Some novels which do not take death as their central theme can still be considered a Gothic work with elements closely associated with violence. Among the elements that are related to death are darkness, isolation, depression and supernaturalism. For example, the theme of depression in the Edgar Allan Poe’s short story *The fall of The House of Usher* supports the theme of death in the novel. Likewise, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the element of



supernaturalism supports the theme of violence and death. Another theme closely associated with death is isolation. For example, the isolation of Dorian's soul leads him to commit violence against others; also, Dorian's isolation leads him to his sick, wild, and erotic desires.

Oscar Wilde's interest in violence is clearly seen in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In this novel, the theme of violence is the third main theme in addition to the theme of decadence and horror. In the story, violence appears in several forms such as suicide, murder, and death. Oscar Wilde emphasizes the theme of violence when Sybil Vane commits suicide as Dorian betrays her and leaves her alone. Then, Dorian kills the painter of his portrait Basil Hallward, his close friend. This act of murder is one of the crimes committed in the novel. These acts of violence ultimately lead Dorian to lead a secret life in the opium den. Also, James Vane's death is another act of violence in the novel. James's being accidentally shot by a hunter represents another horrible act of violence in the novel. The last act of violence, in fact the most terrible one, is the protagonist's death. Dorian stabs himself with the same knife that he used to kill Basil. All these acts lead us to consider this novel a Gothic work filled with violence.

Startling sounds as well as screams in the night that come from isolated places are signs of impending death, hence an integral part of Gothic fiction. Elements of horror in Gothic works are usually associated with death, as can be clearly seen in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In the last scene of the story, Dorian screams with horror in an isolated place (upstairs room). His screams are heard by his servants and other men, who later find that he committed suicide in a tragic way.

### **3-2 SYBIL'S SUICIDE**

The first act of violence in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is Sybil's suicide, which occurs after Sybil learns that Dorian does not love her any more. Dorian leaves her because of her poor artistic performance -she cannot act well on stage. Previously,

Dorian told her that he loved her for her theatrical talents, and that she was a wonderful actress. Yet, at the end of this scene, Dorian finds that her artistic talents fall short of his expectations. As Dorian is speaking to Sybil just before leaving her for good, there is no tone of mercy in his voice. Dorian tells her that she means nothing to him without her art. Sybil does not believe that Dorian will leave her because of a trivial reason like that, but Dorian is serious. She begs him to not leave her but he tells her that he does not want to see her anymore. Then, Dorian returns home and sees the magical change of the picture, which reflects his sinful soul. At that moment, he realizes that he made a big mistake by leaving Sybil. He decides to write a letter of apology to Sybil with words of love. Later, Lord Henry comes to Dorian's house and he informs him that Sybil Vane is dead. Lord Henry tells Dorian that Sybil killed herself at the theater last night, whereupon Dorian gets terribly astonished, and in a cry of horror, says that it is impossible. He has a guilty conscience about the way he treated her:

"So I have murdered Sibyl Vane," said Dorian Gray, half to himself, "murdered her as surely as if I had cut her little throat with a knife. Yet the roses are not less lovely for all that. The birds sing just as happily in my garden. And to-night I am to dine with you, and then go on to the opera, and sup somewhere, I suppose, afterwards. How extraordinarily dramatic life is! If I had read all this in a book, Harry, I think I would have wept over it. Somehow, now that it has happened actually, and to me, it seems far too wonderful for tears. Here is the first passionate love-letter I have ever written in my life. Strange, that my first passionate love-letter should have been addressed to a dead girl".(DGP, p.121).

Considering himself responsible for Sybil's death, Dorian feels guilty and regretful. He realizes that Sybil committed suicide because of her love for him. Lord Henry tells Dorian that he did not kill Sybil; he says that she committed suicide. Lord Henry invites Dorian to have a dinner with him and recommends him not to think about Sybil's death any more. Dorian obeys his master and tries to forget the incident of Sybil's death.

### **3-3 BASIL'S MURDER**

There are two incidents that lead Dorian to murder Basil: First, the magical changes that occur in Dorian's picture; and second, Basil's severe criticism of Dorian for his bad reputation and for the rumors about his corruption. The changes that occur in the picture reflect the secret of Dorian's soul, which Basil has recently come to know.

Basil visits Dorian at the same night of his departure to Paris. He wants to bid farewell to Dorian, and wants to know more about the rumors about him. Basil says that he cannot believe these rumors, especially when he sees Dorian's innocent face. Also, Basil wants to see Dorian's soul, but he says "Only God can do that" (DGP,p.181). Basil starts blaming Dorian for his corrupt way of life, and he tells Dorian that his life has changed from good into evil. So Basil says, "I do want to preach to you . I want you to lead such a life as will make the world respect you. I want you to have a clean name and a fair record. I want you to get rid of the dreadful people you associated with" (DGP, p.180). Basil wants Dorian to get rid of the bad reputation and miserable situation he living in. Basil wants to find out what has happened to Dorian. He asks Dorian to look at the picture, which reflects Dorian's soul. With a terrible laugh, Dorian angrily calls Basil to come with him upstairs to show him the picture. He says, "Come: it is your own handiwork. Why shouldn't you look at it? You can tell the world all about it afterwards, if you choose" (DGP, p.181). Dorian asks Basil to see his evil work, saying "Now it is time for you to look on it face to face" (DGP, p.181). And he tells Basil that he is going to be the first person to see his secret. Dorian says "It is the face of my soul" (DGP,p.186). When he sees the picture, a cry of horror comes from Basil. At first, he thinks that Dorian cannot be as wicked as the ugly man in the picture, but then, he becomes sure that the ugly face in the picture is a reflection of Dorian's corrupt nature. Then, he tells Dorian that the face he has seen reveals the darkness of Dorian's soul. Basil says that Dorian has proved to be more vicious than what people say about him.

Having learned Dorian's darkest secret, Basil blames him for the blackness of his soul. Dorian cannot let Basil live after he has learned everything about him. Basil sits at the table and tells Dorian to pray for God's help, but Dorian says that it is too late. Now, Dorian hates Basil more than he has ever hated anyone in his life. At the same time, Dorian feels extremely angry with him. Then, he takes a knife from the table, and without thinking he stabs Basil and puts the knife into his neck many times until he died:

Dorian Gray glanced at the picture, and suddenly an uncontrollable feeling of hatred for Basil Hallward came over him, as though it had been suggested to him by the image on the canvas, whispered into his ear by those grinning lips. The mad passions of a hunted animal stirred within him, and he loathed the man who was seated at the table, more than in his whole life he had ever loathed anything. He glanced wildly around. Something glimmered on the top of the painted chest that faced him. His eye fell on it. He knew what it was. It was a knife that he had brought up, some days before, to cut a piece of cord, and had forgotten to take away with him. He moved slowly towards it, passing Hallward as he did so. As soon as he got behind him, he seized it and turned round. Hallward stirred in his chair as if he was going to rise. He rushed at him and dug the knife into the great vein that is behind the ear, crushing the man's head down on the table and stabbing again and again. (DGP, p.187).

The conversation between Basil and Dorian about the young man's bad reputation causes Dorian to get so angry that he suddenly takes a knife and kills the painter of his picture. Dorian digs the knife in Basil's neck many times until his head falls forward and his blood spreads on the ground. Dorian breathes fresh air deeply and the narrator puts that "He (Dorian) felt that the secret of the whole thing was not to realize the situation. The friend who had painted the fatal portrait to which all his misery had been due had gone out of his life. That was enough." (DGP, p.188). Dorian thinks

that the painter of this portrait was the main reason for his misery and the only way to get rid of this misery was to kill him.

### **3-4 JAMES VANE'S DEATH**

James Vane's death can be clearly seen as a fatal act of violence in the novel. Although Dorian has persuaded James Vane that he is not responsible for Sybil Vane's suicide, he still fears that James Vane may return later to take revenge upon him. Three days later, Dorian goes with his friends to a shooting party, which is a kind of a hunting occasion. Dorian is heading toward the edge of the forest with Lady Monmouth walking beside him, while the men are shooting at small animals and birds. Dorian is happy and he feels as free as birds. As the rabbit is seen to jumping in the jungle, one of the men Sir Geoffrey fires toward it. Suddenly, they hear two cries in the morning; the first one is the cry of an animal and the second is the cry from a man. They immediately stop shooting and start looking for the injured man. As the narrator puts it:

There were two cries heard, the cry of a hare in pain, which is dreadful, the cry of a man in agony, which is worse. "Good heavens! I have hit a beater!" exclaimed Sir Geoffrey. "What an ass the man was to get in front of the guns! Stop shooting there!" he called out at the top of his voice. "A man is hurt." The head-keeper came running up with a stick in his hand. "Where, sir? Where is he?" he shouted. At the same time, the firing ceased along the line. "Here," answered Sir Geoffrey angrily, hurrying towards the thicket. "Why on earth don't you keep your men back? Spoiled my shooting for the day." (PDG, pp.235-236).

The hunters pull the dead man out of the trees, and Dorian turns away in horror, saying that he cannot run away from bad luck. Dorian thinks that the bad luck follows

him everywhere. It turns out that the man who has been killed is James Vane. He has been accidentally killed by one of the hunters. As Dorian sees the uncovered face of the dead man, he cries with happiness: "A cry of joy broke from Dorian. The man who had been shot in the thicket was James Vane."(DGP, p.243). Dorian knows that he will be safe after James's death. No one will follow him and threaten him any longer.

### **3-5 DORIAN'S SUICIDE**

Dorian's suicide is the last act of violence that occurs in the novel. Dorian resolves to forget about his past, to take off his mind all that happened before. He has decided to change his way of life by looking ahead to a positive future. The magical deterioration that occurs in the picture reflects Dorian's sins and guilt; so these changes cause Dorian to feel regretful for his past actions. As he enters the desolate room upstairs, he closes the door behind him. Then, Dorian looks at his face in the mirror that has been given to him by Lord Henry as a gift. Suddenly, he hates his beauty as he sees his reflection in the mirror. He gets so angry and frustrated that he throws the mirror on the floor and the mirror gets shattered into pieces. This incident reveals his self-hatred as well as his rejection of his own vanity and corruption. Afterwards, he goes to the place where his portrait is. Then, he throws the curtain off the picture. The wrinkled face in the picture horrifies him so much that he tears the picture into pieces. Then, Dorian picks up the knife with which he killed Basil Hallward. He cleans the knife and pushes it into the painting, tearing it into pieces. A cry of horror is heard from inside the closed room. As Dorian's servants hear this cry, they find that Dorian has stabbed himself. His dead body is lying on the floor with the knife in his heart.

He (Dorian) looked round and saw the knife that had stabbed Basil Hallward. He had cleaned it many times, till there was no stain left upon it. It was bright, and glistened. 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. (DGP, p.261).

The dead body lying on the floor has suddenly aged, withered, wrinkled in a horrible change. His servants and other men have identified him only through the rings on his hand. At the same time, the portrait beside him has turned back to its original form. Dorian and the picture have exchanged their appearance. With Dorian's suicide, the man in the portrait becomes young, innocent and beautiful as he was at the beginning. As Edourd Roditi says, "In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the portrait comes at last to life as an indispensable element of the story's action." (Edourd Roditi, 1986, p.p 76-77). Actually, the scene in which the picture's beauty is restored is often regarded as the climax of the novel. By contrast, all the ugly and hideous features of the portrait have been transferred to Dorian's face. Commenting on Dorian's mysterious death, Brian J. Worsfield says:

The portrait represents, so that its destruction means, for Dorian Gray, a symbolic suicide. After a shrill cry is heard, his servants find Dorian Gray" with a knife in his heart (D.G, ch 20) and the portrait returns to its normal and becomes young and beautiful. All these sounds are paradoxical to the readers who know that Dorian Gray intended to stab the portrait and not he himself. The enigmatic closure of the book is thus surrounding by a supernatural halo<sup>5</sup> which is in consonance with the air of mystery that pervades the whole novel. Dorian's death on stage fills the end with a sense of pathos. In addition to this, the servants find out that their master had suddenly become "withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage"(D.G, p.262). The complete identification of the corpse is achieved by their examining the rings in his hand. Consequently, by the laws of ultimate justice, the character

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<sup>5</sup> A circle of white or colored light around the sun, moon, or other luminous body caused by refraction through ice crystals in the atmosphere.

who had committed crimes in the name of youth is finally identified through the signs natural aging-by the marks of age.( Worsfield, 2011, p.203).

Supernaturally, the picture itself becomes the main factor that triggers Dorian's suicide. Dorian wants to destroy the picture because he wants to clean his soul or improve the appearance of his soul. He thinks that all his troubles come from Basil's portrait. As he got rid of the painter in the past, he has decided to get rid of the painting itself. He tries to lessen his feeling of guilt by destroying this portrait. Dorian sees the painting as the one piece of evidence revealing his guilt. At first, he has no intention of killing himself; but then as he stabs the portrait, he symbolically stabs his own heart, which ultimately leads to his decision to kill himself. This act of self-inflicted violence is mixed up with a sense of mystery that dominates the novel: how can the portrait magically return to its normal while the protagonist suddenly becomes an ugly, old man with a wrinkled face? Jose Manuel Correoso Rodenas comments on the destruction of the picture and the ambiguity of Dorian's death, and he considers them as the last elements of Gothic in the novel. As Rodenas points out, "The word *death* has been written within inverted commas because there is doubt about the (story's) end: Is it the real Dorian who lies dead next to the picture with a knife in his heart ? Or, is it only an image of his soul?" (Rodenas, 2013, p.49). Viewed from this perspective, by putting the word *death* between inverted commas, Oscar Wilde creates a sense of doubt and ambiguity about Dorian's death.

Dorian has been punished for his sins, and in the end justice has been served, with the evil being defeated. While the novel is characterized by decadence, horror, and violence, it is deeply allegorical and full of symbolic meanings. Besides, the novel centers on the theme of the double. Commenting on Dorian's double life, Peter Raby says, "Dorian feels keenly the terrible pleasure of double life, and this puts him firmly in the popular Romantic Tradition of The Doppelgänger.( Roby, 2007, p. xvi). Dorian's picture illustrates the division between the strange and the straight aspects of Dorian's identity. After he starts indulging in sinful acts, the picture comes to represent the



protagonist's dark side, turning out to be a symbol of immorality and dirty conscience. In fact, the message of the novel is that the truth cannot be hidden indefinitely, and that any attempt to indulge in sinful acts is sure to be punished. When Dorian tries to destroy the painting, he is punished with the worst penalty- he commits suicide. Another important point to consider is that Oscar Wilde asserts the superiority of art over life, especially through the scene in which the picture returns to its original beauty immediately after Dorian's death.

In conclusion, violence is closely related to the two themes studied in the first and second chapters; namely, decadence and horror. The theme of violence has always been an integral part of the Gothic genre. Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* involves several acts of violence such as suicide, murder and death, which account for its being regarded as a work that belongs to the Gothic genre. Specifically, the acts of violence in the novel are Sybil's, and later, Dorian's suicide, the murder of Basil by Dorian, and John Vane's accidental death by a hunter.

## CONCLUSION

This paper focuses on the gothic elements in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The study includes three Gothic elements - decadence, horror and violence, in addition to other Gothic themes such as supernatural forces, death, decay, double characters and dark places. The thesis consists of three chapters, each chapter including one of the Gothic themes. This thesis centers around Oscar Wilde's interest in the Gothic genre, with special emphasis on the various Gothic elements seen in the novel. The writer has used several Gothic elements such as decadence, horror and violence in order to create an atmosphere reminiscent of the one found in other works written in the gothic tradition. Commenting on the features of the Gothic genre reflected in the novel, Jose Manuel Correoso Rodenas points out, "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, even having been written many years after the end of the awakening of the Gothic genre, still includes elements and characteristics proper of this type of work. Oscar Wilde used those elements in order to create the atmosphere surrounding characters and plot, taking them directly from the Gothic tradition or reformulating them" ( Rodenas, 2013, p.50).

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* tells the story of a young man who wants to keep his beauty and youth forever. However, the protagonist eventually falls into perversion and violence. As he does so, his portrait magically reflects the decay and corruption of his soul. At the end of the novel, Dorian struggles to repent, but he is unable to do so. His failure to change his way of life leads him ultimately to death. One might think that Oscar Wilde feels the same sort of hopelessness as expressed by the protagonist of the

novel. Finally, Dorian commits suicide to destroy his corrupted inner self and to get rid of his miserable situation.

Chapter I includes the acts of decadence found in the novel. Decadence is the most dominant theme in the story because it breeds horror and violence. The theme of decadence is manifested by Dorian's transformation from a well-behaved person into a degenerate man. Under the influence of Lord Henry, Dorian violates the ethical norms of the Victorian society by indulging in sensual pleasures. In fact, he becomes a disciple of Hedonism and falls into corruption. Dorian's decadent life is reflected in many forms in the novel such as homosexuality, vanity, the Yellow book, and his moral degeneration after visiting the Opium dens. Indeed, Dorian spends most of his nights in the opium dens, which are depicted as dark, gloomy and desolate places which represents the nests of lower and bad people.

Chapter Two focuses on the theme of horror in the novel, depicting acts such as Dorian's feeling of horror when he sees the magical change in the picture, and the horrifying incidents that take place in the opium dens and in the dark streets of London. In fact, the supernatural change that occurs in the picture causes Dorian to experience both horror and sorrow. After this incident, Dorian becomes a lonely man who lives in isolation. He is afraid that people might get to know the secret of his picture and discover the true nature of his soul.

The Third Chapter builds around the theme of violence. The first act of violence occurs when Sybil commits suicide on stage after Dorian leaves her. The second one happens when Dorian kills Basil, the artist of his portrait and his friend. The third act of violence is James Vanes' death, and the last one is Dorian's suicide. This incident, which occurs in the last scene of the novel, is one of the most important events in the story because it represents the triumph of good over evil and benevolence over wickedness.

Another Gothic element that can be found in the novel concerns the influence of supernatural forces in human life. The protagonist's behaviors change dramatically after he comes under the influence of the picture's supernatural power. The dual nature of his

portrait illustrates the division between the strange and straight aspects of one's identity. Eventually, as Dorian's life grows increasingly dark and wicked, the picture comes to reflect the darkness of his very soul. Dorian becomes terrified when he sees that the handsome man in the picture has turned out to be an old and ugly man. This change has occurred as a result of the successive sins that Dorian has committed after he fell into corruption. The protagonist's double life reveals how Dorian has changed from good into evil. He starts out as a pure, innocent, and honest man, but gradually he sinks into immorality and corruption. Eventually, Dorian's indulgence in corruption leads him to face horror in desolate places, to commit crimes against others, and to kill himself in an unusually gothic way.

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## APPENDICES A

### CURRICULUM VITAE

#### PERSONAL INFORMATION

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