DIPLOMA THESIS

Themes and Symbols in Oscar Wilde's "The Picture of Dorian Gray".

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Declaration

I, Adea Haxhiavdyli, declare that I worked on my thesis on my own – pursuing the Academic Honesty Statement’s principles in word and spirit – and used the sources mentioned in the Bibliography.
Introduction

Oscar Wilde is known as a famous poet and playwright during the Victorian era in London. His poems, stories and plays inspired numerous people in Victorian England. The Picture of Dorian Gray is Oscar Wilde’s only novel but also a famous one. According to Magid (2017), at least three films have been based on Oscar Wilde’s The Picture of Dorian Gray, the story of a young and beautiful man who longs for eternal beauty. The 1945 version seems to be the most remembered with the portrait appearing in color in an otherwise black and white film. This book has been translated in 200 languages and also 200 million copies have been sold worldwide. It was criticized by many for being an immoral book but Oscar’s ability to speak about any subject with complete fluidity has allowed him to create such a masterpiece. He made several additions before publishing the final version of the book in 1891.

I chose to analyze this novel because of its intriguing characters and also how exquisite the book is, centering around the defining power of art. Dorian Gray is a representative of many things hedonism, morality, and flaws of life but also being human. Eternal youth and beauty cannot last forever and it is best described in this tragic commentary, the reflection will always reveal the spiritual condition. It poses many questions and ideas that captivate your attention from the beginning towards the tragic ending.

In this diploma thesis I will be mainly concentrated on the themes and symbols of the novel. I will first provide the information needed for the biographical part about the author, his life and then his most famous works. Then I will focus on the relevant informations the idea of the novel, the main parts and I will describe the three main characters. Three different people who start a friendship Basil Hallward that is the artist, Lord Henry Wotton and Dorian Gray the young and beautiful boy who is the principal character of the novel. The methodology used in this diploma thesis is the Deductive method, giving a general idea of the novel and relationship between the characters also the biography of the author. The body part will be divided into 5 sections. I will analyze the main themes: The Faustus theme, Aesthetic idea and Morality, Cult of Youth and Beauty also the two main symbols of the novel: The Picture and The Yellow Book. In the Faustus theme I will elaborate the similarity of Faustus a theme that is present in the book. For the Aesthetic idea and Morality I will discuss the portrayal of aestheticism as a concept and morality, for Beauty and Cult of Youth I will include the meaning and the importance of each in the book. I will include details for the picture and the
yellow book as two main symbols of the book. The last section will be the conclusion, giving an overview of this whole work.

I consulted the following books to analyze The Picture of Dorian Gray:


I found these books really helpful for each part which I had to provide an insight or to conclude an opinion to each section.

I want to express my sincere gratitude to my mentor Lirak Karjagdiu. I would like to thank him for being a truly dedicated mentor also for the patient guidance, encouragement and advice through this whole period.
Oscar Wilde long name (Fingal O’Flahertie Wills Wilde) was born in Dublin, Ireland on October 16, 1854. He was the second son of Sir William and Jane Francesca Elgee, who were both well-known figures to the public. Oscar had an older brother, William Charles Kingsbury Wills (Willie) who was born two years prior. His mother whose pen name was ‘Speranza’ created her image as an author of nationalistic poetry and used her verses to speak up for Irish independence and women’s rights. According to Ellmann (1988), Oscar’s father, William, was a medical specialist in complaints of the eye and ear, he was knighted by the British queen in 1864, despite the fact that he was a staunch protestant, he showed his patriotism in collecting and preparing for print tales of Irish Folklore. His practice seemed to fade away when a female patient accused him of sexual assault while she was under sedation. The awareness of this suspicious case and this hideous situation was linked with Sir William’s father and maintaining of three illegitimate children which appeared to have had an effect to Wilde and it had given him a perception into the tensions and contradictions of good society also indicating his continuing artistic interest in the themes of mysterious birth and the ruin of reputations as his biographer suspects.

Oscar’s father had an eager interest in natural history and ethnology. The fascinating curiosity and analytical mind was passed to his younger son, while Lady Wilde gave him her love of art and beauty. In 1858, a new member was welcomed to the Wilde family, a baby girl. She became the family’s most beloved, and Oscar was immediately attached to Isola Francesca. He was devastated by her death at age 9 from a childhood disease. Lady Wilde was feeling in a similar way, most of the time visiting her daughter’s grave. This experience gave Oscar an early glance of death and loss that haunted him forever after. They usually went on weekend trips, in the course of one visit to Glencree, Lady Wilde spontaneously took both Willie and Oscar to a church close by to be baptized. Although very young, Oscar insisted to have remembered the event always as an essential moment in his childhood.

At the age of nine, he went to Portora School at Enniskillen for seven years and left the school on winning an exhibition at the age of seventeen for Trinity College, Dublin. On October 19\textsuperscript{th}, 1871, Oscar entered Trinity College. In 1874 Wilde gained the Berkeley Gold Medal for Greek. In the same year, he won a classical scholarship which enabled him to go to Oxford. On October 17\textsuperscript{th}, 1874, he entered Magdalen College, Oxford, a day after his twentieth birthday. At the same year he had a trip to Italy and went to Greece with Professor
Mahaffy. This experience had different influences that had a great impact and overwhelmed Oscar. Enabling to see from a different perspective and view art, but also the figures of mythology that he was so tempted to overwork them. In 1884 he married Constance Mary Lloyd, they had two sons, Cyril and Vivian born respectively in 1885 and 1886.

Nevertheless, from the year 1886, Wilde was living a double life. On the face of the world he was a happily married man, with two children whom he worshipped, and a successful career in journalism and literature. At the same time, nonetheless, Wilde had also start to explore the banned and risky pleasures of London’s homosexual subculture. The pleasures were prohibited because in 1895 the Criminal Law Amendment Act had criminalized all types of sexual activity amongst men, with a maximum penalty of two years hard labour with convicted offenders. Ironically, in 1886, Wilde had met an Oxford undergraduate called Robbie (Robert Ross). Ross, seems to have seduced Wilde during his wife’s pregnancy, as it seems that he was disgusted by her. At that point, it appears that Wilde progressively sought his sexual pleasures with young men – some from his own background, some from the working class ‘renters’ (male prostitutes who were often soldiers). The riskiest relationship of all was with the unstable and immature Lord Alfred Douglas, whom he met around 1891 and who used Wilde in part as a pawn in his stormy relationship with his father, the Marquess of Queensbery. Wilde fell in love with Douglas even though there was much evidence that the young man was unstable, selfish, extravagant and often unkind to his older lover. Wilde died on November 30, 1900. He was buried in the Bagnex Cemetery on December 3.
Oscar Wilde’s Works

Wilde’s first volume of verse was *Poems* (1881). He proceeded to work on his first play, *Vera; Or the Nihilists*, which was produced in New York in 1883. According to Robbins (2011), Oscar sought a career in journalism, reviewing for the major magazines and at last, in 1887, he became the editor of *The Lady’s World* magazine which was later entitled as *Woman’s World*. Throughout the period of his editorship, Wilde proceeded to become an important person of the moment. From 1888 and so on, he started to remedy that omission in the life of a man of letters, publishing in quick series his two volumes of short stories for children (composed for his two sons), *The Happy Prince and Other Stories* (1888) and *The House of Pomegranates* (1891) stories that draw both on the oral traditions of the folktale and the literary traditions of the fairy story. He compiled a number of long critical essays, texts that disturbed the standards of criticism both in form and content, involving ‘*The Decay of Lying*’ (1889) and ‘*The Critic as Artist*’ (1890), texts which were modified and printed in volume form *Intentions* in 1891.

There were different short stories for a distinct audience (adults), tales such as ‘*Lord Arthur Saville’s Crime*’ and ‘*The Canterville Ghost*’ (both distributed in magazines in 1887), which were moreover collected as a volume in 1891. Furthermore, in 1890, he published his only novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in *Lippincott’s Magazine* (1890), which had further additions and appeared in volume form in 1891. This was the text that had the most significant impact on Wilde’s reputation of his own lifetime, since it would feature largely at his trials four years later, in a mixture of legal process as literary critique. He experimented in addition with drama, composing a symbolist play in French based on the biblical court of Herod the Great and entitled Salomé. The play was prohibited in the English stage supposedly because of its representation of biblical characters.

Soon after, between 1892 and 1895, Wilde wrote the series of social comedies: *Lady Windermere’s Fan* (1892); *A Woman of No Importance* (1893); *An Ideal Husband* (January 1895) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (14 February 1895). These plays were quite outstanding and popular and should have brought Wilde a fortune. Despite that, this did not happen. According to Josephine Guy and Ian Small, Wilde earned huge amounts of money nevertheless not as much as it has sometimes been predicted. These character traits of Wilde’s personal life were observed widely, not least who wrote in
De Profundis. His prison poem *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, was published anonymously under his prison number C.3.3. in 1898.

**Relevant Information about “The Picture of Dorian Gray”**

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* Oscar Wilde explores the relationship between the artist, Basil Hallward and the subject of the portrait that he paints, a young man named Dorian Gray whose beauty is fascinating, and has an obsession to remain young and beautiful forever. The central part of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* remains the same, although whichever version is read, requires attention and critical observation. In the opening scene, a handsome young man has a portrait of himself painted by the artist who admires the model but that is an unrequited love. Towards the end of the painting, the young man is distracted by the artist’s guest which makes him wonder about the simple views of life and makes him explore every thought and every sensation which society opposes. Such thoughts and ideas of the guest make the model realize his youth fully, also appreciate his good looking figure that was not going to remain the same forever. Gradually, the young man wishes for himself to remain the same forever young and for the picture to grow old and mature instead.

His wish is magically fulfilled, the picture continues to grow old and his deeds reflect in the picture in a horrible manner as the portrait turns to be a frightening person whom nobody would seem to trust. As for Dorian, his beauty remains unimpaired. Protected, yet repelled, by his cover-up and further influenced by his knowledgeable mentor, the young man hides the painting and proceeds to live a life full of sins, recklessness, self expressions and also hides a crime (the murder of the artist). His bad deeds continue even after meeting a young actress named Sybil Vane, with whom he falls in love with. She performs in a theater in London’s slums. Her love for Dorian makes her realize that she cannot act anymore because she fell in love now and understood the reality. For this reason, she fails in playing the role of Shakespeare heroines. Furthermore, he breaks his engagement with her, because she can no longer act and he only fell in love with her ability of acting. Later she kills herself. Ultimately, his secret and obsession of the painting whirls him to destroy the picture and free himself of visual memories of his past sins. At last, the moment of destruction comes and turns out to be the time of self-destruction because the magic between the portrait and the man reverses. The man stabs the portrait and tragically ends up dead by his own hand, the spectators come to find an old and wrinkled man whose appearance is frightening.
The Picture of Dorian Gray creates a division of Wilde’s personality among the three principal characters: Basil Hallward, which is the artistic Wilde, creates beauty on canvas in the same manner as Wilde does with words; Lord Henry is an evil version of Algernon Moncrieff, even repeating a few lines of Algernon from Earnest; and Dorian Gray appears as the innocent Wilde then goes on to be Wilde’s satire of the Victorian ideas of good and evil, that someone who is attractive is undoubtedly good, while evil is written on the individual’s face.

Basil Hallward’s passion for Dorian is pure but this passion was not reciprocal. This is the artist’s passion for beauty, and as Basil implies, “As long as I live, the personality of Dorian Gray will dominate me.” (Wilde, 1891, pp. 13) The picture painted and Dorian himself proceed to haunt Hallward continuously until he is murdered by the hands of Dorian. Although Oscar Wilde insists that “All art is quite useless” it is crucial to bear in mind that at the beginning of the preface he says that “The artist is the creator of the beautiful things”.

Lord Henry Wotton, on the contrary, uses satire and wittiness to critique the failings of the Victorian society that the majority regard as virtues. One of the first things that Lord Henry says when meeting Dorian repeats precisely one of Wilde’s most quoted lines:

“The only way to get rid of 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”. (Wilde, 1891, pp. 18)

The Victorian period was intertwined with ideals of self-denial and self control, which Wilde displays in most of his novel as being hypocritical, both in theory and reality. Lord Henry recognizes the hidden feelings, gives in to them, and finds society foolish, he has a manner of controlling himself and knowing when to stop talking. Even he cannot stand Dorian’s behaviour and has been distant from him for many years at the time of Dorian’s death. Wilde’s writing turns ridiculous when it faces with Dorian’s negative thoughts also lack of compassion and pity for others. Nonetheless, Dorian emerges into a frightening figure, and in the end the satiric powers of the absurd cannot stop him. It is his own growing passion that leads him to ruin and stab the portrait, killing himself at the exact moment.
Of all the characters of the novel Oscar Wilde mentions the three principal characters, he announced that: “Basil Hallward is what I think I am: Lord Henry what the world thinks of me: Dorian is what I would like to be-in other ages perhaps.” (Bloom, pp. 51)

Basil Hallward is a friend to the young man and he has his own isolated world. He is the most conventional of the three characters. He is afraid of exposing himself too much: "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 coloured 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.” (1890, The Picture of Dorian Gray, pp. 8). Art usually portrays the superficial surface of the inanimate or animate object that is being painted by the artist. A numb creature that is having its reflection painted as if seen itself in a mirror. But not at this point, Basil has captured so much more than that, he revealed his connection with the sitter. He is struggling to hide the passion for Dorian and in a way combines art and painting to cover his true feelings for him. Nonetheless Basil seems to be the voice of reason.

According to Jerusha (1997), Basil Hallward is: “the key to the Trinity, playing to the Father and Son, the Holy Ghost. Absorbed into the silence of the portrait, Basil exemplifies the unutterable longing which saturates the book – the longing for beauty, for youth, for immortality. It is the quality of that desire which lends the book greatness; but it is the strategy by which that desire is accomplished that makes it modern. What Basil precipitates is a drama of appropriation, as Dorian is 'made his own' by being painted”. Dorian’s character develops the most in the novel. At the beginning he is a pure and an unspoiled young man who has just entered the real world making further steps in the social world. Dorian boosts his ego with Lord Henry’s idea of hedonism, turning into an entirely different person. He becomes narcissistic, loving no one but himself. His crimes and sins drive him mad, at least killing his own figure in the portrait which leads to his own death. However, it is tough to imagine at first glance what the relation of this character with the author could be.

In Wilde’s words: “Dorian is what I would like to be-in other ages perhaps” (Bloom, pp. 51) Perhaps he longs to be the principle character of his novel because Dorian takes risks and does everything that Wilde would dream to do. He takes part in hidden pleasures that the London city offers. Oscar Wilde would want to be like Dorian because Dorian seems to walk
with his head up high and does not care what people say about him. Another fact that merges the parts of this puzzle together is that Wilde was homosexual and he could not express his feelings in public that he had for other men. Victorian society had different rules and was harsh towards homosexuality different from the contemporary society that is today. In the novel, it is implied that Dorian is homosexual, or at least bisexual. In the uncensored version of the novel, although Wilde does not give any scene or actual practice of homosexuality, these outcomes can be seen more clearly.

It shows that Dorian is not judged for that, it could be because of him being wealthy and having a high position in society. Apparently that is what Wilde would want, not to feel the prejudice for his feelings and emotions, and to be allowed to show his true self in public. As a result of this pressure of Victorian society, Oscar, would like to be Dorian, but in another age. In our society, this would not be a problem, as he would be able to expose himself in public, show his homosexuality, and live a normal life without thinking of the fear of being sent to prison.

Lord Henry Wotton is also one of the characters that could be compared with the life of Oscar Wilde. He is a cynical nobleman who deeply influences Dorian Gray. He perhaps never meant to corrupt him; for him his incredible influential words and sermons seem to be just words. Lord Henry has a keen observation to people whose life is interesting, while Lord Henry thinks that Dorian does live an interesting life.

This man preaches his theories about youth, old age, life and pleasure in a way that delights the young man’s passions. Although, most of what he says is not ethically correct to Victorian moral standards still, the characters of the novel find him as a good man with an attractive personality.

This character is quite related with the author who shares profound and interesting traits. Wilde believes that people see him the way that Lord Henry is. Lord Henry is not quite brave on the contrary he does not seem to live according to what he preaches. He probably does not even believe in what he says but that way of saying things is only to charm other people. Lord Henry and the author criticize and oppose the society that they live in.
Themes and symbols in “The Picture of Dorian Gray”

The Faustus Theme

The major plot of The Picture of Dorian Gray is set in London, and it seems to be a moral tale about sin and the imminent penalty. The story of Dorian Gray reflects the legend of Faustus, the man who is eternally damned, that attempts to sell his soul to the devil, an exchange for knowledge as he aspires to learn more. This character doubts that hell and heaven exist, but further he understands the curse that will occur to him. An old man urges Faustus to repent but he asks the devil (Marlowe) to torture him. Faustus meets the devil and he comes to carry his soul. It is not so late to beg for mercy but Faustus thinks that God cannot help him, in that way he loses hope and begs the devil not to take him. No one is beyond the power of God and that is why Faustus is taken to hell and his sin also him not begging for forgiveness are the reasons why Faustus is not saved. The picture of Dorian Gray echoes Faustus in many parts, Dorian is intrigued by the delights and pleasures that the eternal youth and beauty can offer, in the same way as Faustus is curious about the promise of unlimited knowledge. After some time passes, Dorian thinks about repenting for his actions but he is always discouraged because he thinks that it is too late which could be associated with Faustus’s persuasion that he does not need God’s help. The last chance for Dorian to ask for forgiveness is when Basil tries to convince him to pray and Dorian turns around with tears on his eyes and says:

“It is too late, Basil,” he faltered

“It is never too late, Dorian. Let us kneel down and try if we cannot remember a prayer. Isn’t there a verse somewhere, ‘Though your sins be as scarlet, yet I will make them as white as snow?’” (Wilde, 1891, pp. 125)

Dorian does not believe that Basil will help him so he refuses to change and then tortures Basil for his attempt. In the same way as Faustus did when he did not believe that he could be saved. That part in The Picture of Dorian Gray ends with a murder, rejecting his only possibility to be rescued and so later he believes that Basil could have saved him. He thinks to himself:

“[n]ot ‘Forgive us our sins’ but ‘Smite us for our iniquities’ should be the prayer of man to a most just God,”(Wilde, 1891, pp. 174) implying that he does not believe in God’s
forgiveness. Dorian misunderstands the idea of changing his way of living, he thinks that it takes more than the power of God to save him. He is frightened day after day of his portrait, when at last he finds a way to destroy it so he can no longer feel his conscience whine. He accuses the painter for being “too much afraid of life” (Wilde, 1891, pp. 89) which is an irony because Dorian fears it more than the painter itself. He tries to hide from the reality, finding pleasure on beauty and the concept of Aestheticism. Moreover, the narrator notes that the:

“[u]gliness that had once been hateful to [Dorian] because it made things real, became dear to him now for that very reason,” (Wilde, 1891, pp. 147) displaying Dorian’s unfortunate way of living which unabled him to truly enjoy his unpretentious way that he wanted to live at the beginning of the novel. Walter Pater gives explanation about the novel on his review of The Picture of Dorian Gray as “a kind of dainty Epicurean theory” and Dorian as “a quite unsuccessful experiment in Epicureanism.” The publisher George Lock remarks that Lord Henry is the one of the three main characters that is alive at the end of the novel and does not have any problem despite his immoral ideas and thoughts that influenced Dorian. Lord Henry gives less warning for the Decadence and the dangers of Aestheticism, he is a much better version as an experiment in the Aesthetic mode of living. Basil tries to keep Dorian on the right track of his life, he is the personification of his virtue, and Lord Henry is the personification of his vice, leading him to a life full of sin, named “Mephistopheles” by Hawthorne. It is quite interesting how Marlowe is cursed and punished even after hell, whereas Lord Henry is never punished or judged for his views. His divorce by his wife at the end of the novel is a kind of a punishment but still he does not seem to love her so much, so it might not be considered as a punishment that was fully deserved. He confesses to Dorian that he has “sorrows . . . of [his] own, that even [Dorian knows] nothing of,” (Wilde, 1891, pp. 171) these sorrows of his actions can be the regret of many perhaps because he did not live his life fully while he was young, and that is something that he regrets doing. Henry does not seem to be Dorian’s only influence, Basil made a slight difference too. After Sibyl’s death, Basil a short dialogue with Dorian:

“You talk as if you had no heart, no pity in you. It is all Harry’s influence. I see that.”

The lad flushed up and, going to the window, looked out for a few moments on the green, flickering, sun-lashed garden.

“I owe a great deal to Harry, Basil,” he said at last, “more than I owe to you. You only
taught me to be vain.”

“Well, I am punished for that, Dorian--or shall be some day.” (Wilde, 1891, pp. 88)

Basil influenced Dorian in a way too, he worshipped him too much, turning him into a narcissist. At the beginning of the novel Basil and Lord Henry are depicted as the good character and the bad one but later it is revealed that even Basil plays a small role in Dorian’s transformation. Basil pays him too many compliments. He does that even though he admits that “all influence is immoral.” (Wilde, 1891, pp. 17) Nevertheless, Basil is much more innocent than Lord Henry. These reversed characters can be brought together as Eltis argues: “from sexual stereotypes to the unbending rules of puritan morality, all laws and systems which sought to categorize or control humankind were targets for Wilde’s attack,” (Eltis, 1996, pp. 209) also for “[h]is plays subverted the conventions of the popular stage [and] challenged the strict morality they upheld.” (Eltis, 1996, pp. 209)

Lord Henry’s figure and his character seem to be the reason of conflicting views on the novel. However, his theories are intertwined with moral assumptions and religion which he reverses and that can refer as the Faustus theme. These values are reversed confidentially.
Aesthetic idea and morality

The novel of Oscar Wilde revolves around new theories in the traditional way of life in Victorian England. Oscar Wilde gives his thoughts about aestheticism and reflects in his novel about aestheticism as a concept. The Picture of Dorian Gray was first presented in Lippincott’s Magazine in 1890. The novel was criticized for being filthy. The main principle of this movement known as aestheticism which Wilde supports is: the worship of beauty. The author shares and persuades the readers to further read by encouraging aestheticism which offers new moral norms and views in The Picture of Dorian Gray. Oscar Wilde did not invent the Aesthetic movement but “he was a spokesman for the late 19th-century Aesthetic movement in England, which advocated art for art’s sake” (Luebering, 2011, pp. 133).

After the first version of the novel was published, the novel was strongly criticized, and for this reason the author modified a few parts by adding a preface and other six chapters to it. The outstanding preface became a king of anthem of aestheticism and different points of views were given about the aim of art and its moral concept. According to Wilde, “…the artist is a creator of beautiful things. To reveal art and conceal the artist is art’s aim.” (Wilde, 1891, pp. 3) In this way, “Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming.”(Wilde, 1891, pp. 3) The author implies that the only purpose of art is beauty that brings pleasure without any moral content.

Moreover, in his portrayal of aesthetics Oscar Wilde criticizes humans who behave and obey the rules according to the norms of society rather than being released to be themselves and allowing to feel the happiness of the greatest extent. In the tradition of hedonism aestheticism advocates any behavior that would expand the beauty and happiness in one’s life: ”To the aesthete, the ideal life mimics art; it is beautiful, but quite useless beyond its beauty, concerned only with the individual living it.” (Duggan, 2009, pp. 61)

In the novel the attention is directed mostly to the aesthetics values and hedonistic approach to life. Lord Henry Wotton’s character is created to share the author’s perceptions on hedonistic lifestyle, moral and aesthetic ideas. Being a proponent of Hedonism Lord Henry Wotton guides Dorian and lectures him the philosophy of “New Hedonism”. He influences Dorian effortlessly and gives the young man the faith in life by leading him to seek forbidden pleasures, the ones which society opposes. Lord Henry lectures: “We are punished for our refusals. Every impulse that we strive to strangle broods in the mind, and poisons
us... Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden itself” (Wilde, 1979, pp. 16).

Life is worth living only if a human lives life truly to a full extent also by not living in fear to ask others for permission or if other people approve of your decisions in life. Dorian applies the theories of Lord Henry the idea of self-indulgence and selfish delights in life. The central part of his lifestyle become beauty and sensual pleasures. Regardless of the worship of aesthetic values and ideas, it should be emphasized that sometimes these delightful desires and passions can lead to a life of immoral acts. This kind of life without any common sense, a life of a pure aesthetic lifestyle can lead to fatal consequences. Dorian Gray portrays best how these beliefs of aesthetics can destroy the life by following these beliefs madly. For this reason, Oscar Wilde provides the details of how dangerous can aesthetic movement be, sometimes the magnificent part of it but also its corruptive effect to moral that can further transpire.

Dorian Gray doesn’t have any experience, he is persuadable, and untutored. He disrespects and neglects the social norms and moral values by being involved in scandalous affairs, forbidden pleasures that are driven by lust. When talking about morality it is important to note Oscar Wilde’s comment to his former lover, a letter to Alfred Douglas: “All excess, as well as all renunciation, brings its own punishment” (Duggan, 2009, pp. 5). This sentence was the conclusion of Oscar about morality in Dorian Gray. Oscar Wilde wrote a letter to the editor of the St. Jame’s Gazette, where he says: “And the moral is this: All excess, as well as all renunciation, brings its own punishment. The painter, Basil Hallward, worshipping physical beauty far too much, as most painters do, dies by the hand of one in whose soul he has created a monstrous and absurd vanity. Dorian Gray, having led a life of mere sensation and pleasure, tries to kill conscience, and at that moment kills himself. Lord Henry Wotton seeks to be merely the spectator of life. He finds that those who reject the battle are more deeply wounded than those who take part in it.” (Wilde, 2005, pp. 412).

At one point, aestheticism is not about one person’s denial from ambition and desires, nonetheless, on the other hand, madness and uncontrolled selfindulgence can ruin life and be harmful. Along these lines, Wilde tends to be honest when supporting aesthetic ideals by telling the truth to be cautious and prudent when choosing this lifestyle. The character of Dorian Gray gives evidence what will happen for one who lets his passions go thoughtlessly. In the meantime, Lord Henry continues to be an indifferent observer of the young boy whom
he influenced and inspired to live this life of sins. His first changes in personality take place when he rejects Sibyl Vane. For Dorian the young actress symbolizes the beauty of heart. Her failure to perform afterwards on the scene ruins his aesthetic ideal as she no longer serves a purpose and he abandons her with no regrets. “Without your art, you are nothing.” – asserts cruel Dorian (Wilde, 1979, pp. 62).

After the suicide of Sibyl Vane, Dorian’s compassion turns into a neglection with indifferent observation toward the news. Hence, Dorian’s visionless persuasion toward aestheticism is contrary to morality as the hero remains unconscious about it. His soul and mind are gradually poisoned by excessive disposition to unlimited aestheticism and hedonism. Striving for egoistic pleasures he transforms into a narcissistic and selfish person who is indifferent to the misfortune of other people. In this way, Dorian avoiding the conflict between the moral values and aestheticism, gives a clear meaning to the readers. Narcissism is a significant principle of unconditional aestheticism.

Dorian reveals his loss of morality in his actions as a consequence of his arrogance. The portrait reflects the process of degradation of the hero of his soul meanwhile Dorian cherishes the youth and beauty that seem to last an eternity. However, the punishment will occur in the near future. After that, when he finally decides to begin a new life and tries to stab his portrait he kills himself. The only thing that is left as a heritage after his death is his jewelries to symbolize his deep worship of the pure aesthetic life and that his real essence lies there. According to Wilde, the aesthetic direction needs to be taken with abstinence and have enough boundaries that signifies moral responsibility. Only when you have self discipline and self control it can be possible to get rid of the opposite effects on society and on someone who preaches aestheticism. Otherwise, a limitless execution of these thoughts can result to a horrible ending. The Picture of Dorian Gray provides a deep understanding of the catastrophic outcome of living a pure aesthetic life given the example that of the main hero. Dorian finally realizes all his mistakes and uncontrolled actions too late after the disastrous events have happened already. Wilde still emphasizes the importance of morality and prudent approach, despite beauty and the pursuit of happiness that to him form an aesthetic ideal.

Unrestrained aestheticism affects and ruins the moral values, creates a lack of empathy encourages egocentrism also decline of personality. At times pointless desires and wishes must be forgotten so that one does not hurt the others or be a part of something that can destroy themselves. Aesthetic rules need to be in concordance with the moral principles and
coexist together. Hence, The Picture of Dorian Gray was written to warn people to be reasonable before going under influence of a new movement rather than promoting it. This new movement occurred previously, then the novel was written in time to signify the consequences of aesthetic lifestyle. The judgemental reviews of different readers were superficial to The Picture of Dorian Gray also negative because they couldn’t comprehend the real meaning of it. Later, people began to comprehend the novel in a different way and the significance of it was evident.
Cult of Youth and Beauty

Geoffrey Schöning points out that, “the period in which beauty can express itself to the most and sensibility reaches its peak does not last very long of course: It is fleeting youth. The very circumstance nearly forces to lift it up into the hedonistic triumvirate of self-development, the permanent chase after new sensations, and physical beauty.” (Schöning, 2000, pp. 5). The cult of youth and beauty are altered to selfish hedonism in the novel. One of the main themes in the novel is the cult of youth and beauty. Oscar Wilde wrote his opinion about art in the preface conveying a message that is somehow understood as art’s only aim is beauty. He adopts a preface on the novel with a reflection on the artist, art and the utility of both. While speaking of beauty from the aesthetic perspective, Wilde gives its deeper meaning and only its concept in art. For the central characters beauty is placed first and morality is rejected. They behave in a particular way because “For the sake of beauty” shifted into a kind of lifestyle.

The predominance of youth and beauty is given on the first chapter of the novel. The artist Basil Hallward is astonished with Dorian Gray’s beauty and he paints him in order for his beauty to remain in a portrait for an eternity. Dorian is a hero who influences the artist to create a masterpiece out of his portrait. While Basil is painting Dorian, Lord Henry Wotton tries to meet Dorian and with the first chance he gets, tries to persuade him. Lord Henry influences the main hero and expresses his aesthetic philosophy and hedonism. To him the essential part of a human is beauty. He ensures Dorian that when people are young and beautiful can have privileges that can make every thing possible. He says: “People say sometimes that Beauty is only superficial as Thought is. To me, Beauty is the wonder of wonders. It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible. . . Yes, Mr Gray, the gods have been good to you. But what the gods give they quickly take away. You have only a few years in which to live really, perfectly and fully. When your youth goes, your beauty will go with it, and then you will suddenly discover that there are no triumphs left for you, or have to content yourself with those mean triumphs that the memory of your past will make it more bitter than defeats. Every month as it wanes brings you nearer to something dreadful. Time is jealous of you, and wars against your lilies and your roses. You will become sallow, and hollow-cheeked, and dull eyed. You will suffer horribly . . . Ah! realise your youth while you have it. Don’t squander the gold of your days, listening to the tedious, trying to improve the hopeless failure, or giving away your life to the ignorant, the common, and the vulgar. These are sickly
aims, the false ideals, of our age. Live! Live the wonderful life that is in you! Let nothing be lost upon you. Be always searching for new sensations. Be afraid of nothing . . . A new Hedonism – that is what century wants. You might be its visible symbol. With your personality there is nothing you could not do”. (Wilde, 1981, pp. 19-20)

These superficial values seem to matter to Dorian and he is convinced with everything that Lord Henry says. Dorian is first influenced by the beauty of art when he meets the actress Sibyl Vane the one that fascinates him with her talent and charm on stage. Dorian worships beauty with such intensity and that helps him to stay away from the outcomes of his horrible deeds. He studies a lot enjoys beauty and finds it in music, theater and different luxuries that surround him. “For these treasures, and everything that he collected in his lovely house, were to be to him means of forgetfulness, modes by which he could escape, for a season, from the fear that seemed to him at times to be almost too great to be borne.” (Wilde, 1891, pp. 98). In the meantime, his determination in the power of beauty comes by the adoration of society. People found Dorian as “...a type of which they had often dreamed... he seemed to be of the company of those whom Dante describes as having sought to “make themselves perfect by the worship of beauty.” (Wilde, 1891, pp. 103). The hero continues to be a guest of honor at the events that take place, when at last his destructive scandals and numerous affairs ruin his reputation. He is introduced as a nobleman and as a model for “the young exquisites of the Mayfair balls and Pall Mall club windows” (Wilde, 1891, pp. 104). His everlasting beauty, elegant apparel and excellent behaviour make him feel superior. Furthermore, people would not find him suspicious “even those who had heard the most evil things against him... could not believe anything to dishonor when they saw him” (Wilde, 1891, pp. 102). Beauty and youth had a considerable significance to the Victorian society. For these superficial values and unlimited dedication for beauty and youth caused Dorian his fatal death. It is implied in the novel that decisions need to be estimated so that one would not end up as the main character of the novel. As the critic Alex Ross stated: "Wilde’s aestheticism, his fanatical cult of beauty, was the deepest and most lasting of his passions, and it is now the most radical thing about him” (Ross, 2011, pp. 5). The Picture of Dorian Gray inscribed the moral story into the lives of three characters and cautions the readers against the obsession of physical appearance at the expense of one’s common sense and consciousness.
Symbols

The Picture

The personalities in the Picture of Dorian Gray and the relationship between art and reality are intertwined with two main symbols of the novel: the picture and the yellow book. Wilde explains the fact that a full length portrait of a man is an analogue for the reflection of him in a mirror. He had previously experimented by setting images and mortals in emotional relationships also this came across by his obsession of what is ‘real’ in art and life. In ‘Charmides’ (Poems, 1881), a young and beautiful ‘Grecian lad’ falls in love with the sacred statue of Pallas Athene and makes love to it, then he is drowned. A statue is still considered a desired object for its beauty, even when brought to life. Hence, the boy drowned in the pool after falling in love with his own image because ‘as he lay on my banks and looked down at me, in the mirror of his eyes I saw ever my own beauty mirrored. (Wilde, 1881)

The Picture of Dorian Gray has sometimes confused its readers, even after Wilde modified the novel. Lord Henry, being portrayed as a generous critic, and categorizing his friend’s achievement as ‘the finest portrait of modern times’ and ‘a wonderful work of art’, does not seem to predict the power of art to change the lives of the painter and the sitter. He never figures out his mistake. Basil Hallward, the artist, sees what he wants to see in the picture an image of his marvelous work, in which his artistic pride and shame won’t let him expose it. Meanwhile for Dorian as time goes by he is not able to grasp the beauty of the picture nor Basil’s talent, as for him it only becomes a terrifying memento mori like Yorick’s skull. Dorian is extremely jealous of his own image painted in canvas as if it was another young man replacing him. He is envious of the picture’s resistance of time and destruction.

If the image of the painting would remain the same then the portrait would not alter and it would not be as powerful or a way of dramatizing between the whole actions that take place through the whole novel. Wilde goes much further than this when he creates the terrible changes in the portrait, time by time showing the change and decay that Dorian at the very beginning denies. It gives such a vivid demonstration, depicting the old image of Dorian in the portrait and reflecting his actual soul. This masterpiece possesses its temporal extension by demonstrating the extra dimension in which it was written. Wilde argued in his long article ‘The Critic as Artist’ that was published only a month after the Lippincott’s edition of
Dorian, that true critics were artists on their own, but true creative writing was superior to painting and sculpture:

“The statue is concentrated to one moment of perfection. The image stained upon the canvas possesses no spiritual element of growth or change . . . Movement, that problem of the visible arts, can be truly realised by Literature alone . . . . For the domain of the painter is . . . widely different from that of the poet. To the latter belongs life in its full and absolute entirety; not merely the momentary grace of form or the transient gladness of colour, but the whole sphere of feeling, the whole cycle of thought. The painter is so far limited that it is only through the mask of the body that he can show us the mystery of the soul . . . only through its physical equivalents that he can deal with psychology. “ [Complete Works, pp. 1124, 1128]

This whole mystery is expressed by the painter but it is language which reveals us the magic of the painting’s transformation and which deeds evil or good ones are predicated by its change. This description of the picture’s visible content has become a ‘space’ or a preeminent example for the readers, whether they are heterosexual or homosexual, they have framed their fears and hopes. We receive more details about the novel’s progress not just the full length image of a man in modern dress which turns into a hideous and horrible person. Meanwhile Dorian thinks of this portrait more as a diary, something that will illustrate his everyday routine and that will be there as a memory. He says that it is the: ‘diary of my life from day to day, and it never leaves the room in which it is written’ (Wilde, 1891, pp. 122). This picture is a linguistic construct from the very beginning towards the ending.
The Yellow Book

A powerful symbol which is included in the novel and which has come to represent is the book that influences Dorian’s life permanently, which he does not know whether it is for better or for worse. In Chapter 2, Lord Henry Wotton thinks of a curious book that was a revelation for him in his youth; in Chapter 10 he gives to Dorian the book ‘bound in yellow paper’ that becomes a part of his journey and the hero ‘became to him a kind of prefiguring type of himself’ (Wilde, 1891, p. 102). Lord Henry disclaims to Dorian that there is no such thing as ‘being poisoned by a book’, since art is ‘superbly sterile’ and it ‘has no influence upon action’ (Wilde, 1891, p. 172). After this part Dorian is persuaded blindly by Lord Henry’s pronouncements. Dorian seems to be inexperienced and so he trusts Lord Henry and believes that Henry is proving him wrong. Wilde’s own experiences with lawyers and critics who rejected this novel and believed it was filthy prove him wrong also while ridiculously giving evidence of the novel’s prophetic qualities. Wilde genuinely wrote this line for Dorian as speaking for himself ‘the whole book seemed to him to contain the story of his own life, written before he had lived it’ (Wilde, 1891, p. 102).

When Dorian Gray reads the yellow book, he is enchanted by the intoxicating volume and it inspires him to exceed the efforts of the hero on that book. His desperate search for pleasure is an essence that he could not find, afterwards he intends to apply and ‘realise in the nineteenth century all the passions and modes of thought that belonged to every century except his own’ (p. 100). He dreams himself involved with historical personalities, passions, scents, colours, sins that illuminate Wilde’s claim in the Preface that says ‘Vice and virtue are to the artist materials for art.’ In Chapter 11 no dialogue is used, only the narration of the author and the expression of the character’s inner thoughts:

“The worship of the senses has often, and with much justice, been decried . . . But it appeared to Dorian Gray that the true nature of the senses had never been understood, and that they remained savage and animal merely because the world had sought to starve them into submission or to kill them by pain . . . . As he looked back upon man moving through History, he was haunted by a feeling of loss. So much had been surrendered! and to such little
There had been mad willful rejections, monstrous forms of self-torture and self-denial, whose origin was fear, and whose result was a degradation infinitely more terrible than that fancied degradation from which . . . they had sought to escape . . .” (Wilde, 1891, pp. 104)

In this part the narrator starts a sentence with a question about insincerity and gives Dorian’s personal opinion. In the fourth sentence it portrays his suspicion about the consequences of insincerity which also represent the narrator’s beliefs and interpretations that cannot be dismissed. However, in the final sentence of the paragraph, it is not very clear whose trust is posed here, notably repercussions of Lord Henry (and perhaps of Walter Pater) echo through the passage. After that Wilde seems to go beyond for a moment removing his mask to reveal, in the first person singular, supported and cherished views on sincerity and style, but still again he is disguised immediately afterwards:

*Is insincerity such a terrible thing? I think not. It is merely a method by which we can multiply our personalities.*

*Such, at any rate, was Dorian Gray’s opinion.* (Wilde, 1891, pp. 113)

In another section of the chapter, the narrative follows a distinct first-person-plural-perspective, which helps the readers to form an emotional bond with a hero who, at different times, can seem both objectionable and absurd:

*There are a few of us who have not sometimes wakened before dawn . . . Veil after veil of thin dusky gauze is lifted, and by degrees the forms and colours of things are restored to them, and we watch the dawn remaking the world in its antique pattern. The wan mirrors get back their mimic life. The flameless tapers stand where we had left them, and beside them lies the half-cut book that we had been studying, or the wired flower that we had worn at the ball, or the letter that we had been afraid to read, or that we had read too often. Nothing seems to us changed. Out of the unreal shadows of the night comes back to real life that we had known.* (Wilde, 1891, pp. 105)

The entire chapter gives at last the essential changes to Dorian’s personality, but it is intentionally left ambiguous and makes us wonder whether the book disoriented his otherwise natural artistic curiosity in the direction of sin and vice, or whether sin and vice are being held up as ‘modes’ through which we may ‘realise [a true] conception of the beautiful’.
The yellow book operates for Wilde in two ways, it is able to work both for good and for evil times. He confessed in a letter written in 1894, ‘the book that poisoned, or made perfect, Dorian Gray does not exist; it is a fancy of mine merely’. At the time of the libel trial in 1895 Wilde told under cross-examination that the yellow book was Huysmans’s À rebours, hence it has been referred to as the ‘original’. Wilde brings together the contrast where he states in an earlier letter that ‘the book . . . is one of the many . . . I have never written, but it is partly suggested by Huysmans’s À rebours . . . it is a fantastic variation on Huysmans’s over-realistic study’. (Letters, pp. 524) He probably forgot that he had actually given the book in the typescript with a title, ‘Le Secret de Raoul par [by] Catulle Sarrazin’, words cancelled by Stoddart from the typescript. Prior to this, whatever source is the yellow book’s, the real importance of it lies in its poison and claim trying to make it look evil and good at the same time, a claim that Wilde liked to repeat in the novel that contains it and is represented by it. The Daily Chronicle viewed the Lippincott’s version of Dorian Gray ‘poisonous’, Wilde responded by saying: ‘My story is an essay on decorative art . . . It is poisonous if you like, but you cannot deny that it is also perfect, and perfection is what we artists aim at.’ (Daily Chronicle, ‘Magazines’, 1890)
Conclusion

The Picture of Dorian Gray is a novel that conveys the meaning of beauty, hedonism, morality and eternal youth. It is possible that we have an image of ourselves which we try to preserve, but it is our actions that define us. At least three movies have been based in this novel but the most famous one is the version of 1945 which is most known. A few of the silver screen’s classic actors are featured in Dorian Gray, including George Sanders as Lord Henry Wotton, Angela Lansbury as Sybil Vane, Peter Lawford as Basil Hallward, and Donna Reed as Hallward’s niece Gladys. The book has been translated in many languages and its copies has been sold worldwide. Wilde was known for his numerous affairs also for details of his private life which were revealed during the trial.

The Picture of Dorian Gray explored the concept of Aestheticism, Eternal Youth, Beauty and Morality. The main important topics were the themes and symbols. Themes such as the Faustus theme, Aesthetic idea and Morality, Cult of Youth and Beauty. Dorian Gray reflected an echo of the legend of Faustus which was the first theme. He was influenced and easily persuaded which is comparable with Faustus.

Aestheticism was popular at that time while the novel was written, and also it revolves around the novel as the worship of beauty. Even though Wilde did not invest in the movement he was a spokesman for 19th-century Aesthetic movement in England, which advocated art for art’s sake. It was known that the principle of aestheticism was beauty that brings pleasure without any moral content. Loss of morality is portrayed also by Dorian Gray’s character. The influence of Lord Henry to Dorian leads him to a life full of sins and murder, in the end ending up killing himself.

Cult of Youth and Beauty are discussed in this novel several times. Beauty is superficial but really important to most of the characters in this book. To them beauty comes first and they react in this particular way because “For the sake of beauty” shifted into a kind of lifestyle. Lord Henry points out that when people are young and beautiful, they can have privileges that can make every thing possible. The obsession of youth cause these consequences to happen.

The symbols are the picture and the yellow book. Another prominent example of a symbol is the stabbing of the painting. The stabbing of the portrait of Dorian resulting in the death of Dorian is symbolic, for it represents what happens when art is damaged. The image of the
painting is a powerful way of dramatizing between the actions that take place through the whole novel.

This book conveys an important message about the worship of youth and beauty but also of aestheticism as a concept. People should never dedicate their life fully to aestheticism, such a lifestyle with no rules or boundaries can have dangerous consequences. Youth and beauty are something temporary that one may not have forever and even in the face of utter beauty morals are inescapable.
Bibliography


