

SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES
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**FACETS OF OSCAR WILDE FRAGMENTED INTO THE THREE MAIN CHARACTERS OF
*THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY***

Porto Alegre
2021

GRADUAÇÃO



Pontifícia Universidade Católica
do Rio Grande do Sul

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Monograph presented to the Letters – English
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requirement to obtain the title of Graduate in
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Advisor: Ma. Débora Amorim Garcia Ardais

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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. (WILDE, 2012, p. 79)

RESUMO

A presente monografia tem por objetivo uma investigação que propõe que Oscar Wilde tenha fragmentado aspectos de si mesmo e de sua vida nos três personagens principais de *O Retrato de Dorian Gray*: Lord Henry Wotton, Basil Hallward, e Dorian Gray. A fim de alcançar sua finalidade, esse trabalho contemplou a versão original do romance em questão, publicada em 1890, os fatores socioculturais do período histórico em que *Dorian Gray* foi publicado, e um panorama original das crenças Estéticas e pessoais de cunho teórico de Wilde, construído a partir de seus ensaios, palestras profissionais e correspondência pessoal. Tal parte da pesquisa foi fortemente sustentada pelos trabalhos do biógrafo Richard Ellmann e também pelas contribuições de acadêmicos como Andrea Selleri, cujos ensaios sobre a carreira de Wilde enquanto crítico serviram de embasamento para ajudar essa monografia a encontrar seu recorte no que concerne o legado crítico de Wilde e suas principais fundamentações teóricas. A análise final foi conduzida através da construção de paralelos entre excertos do romance e a individualidade de seu autor, levando em consideração as ideias, a personalidade e a reputação de Wilde, apropriando-se de uma carta escrita por ele em 12 de fevereiro de 1894 como um ponto de partida e um argumento de apoio para o estudo.

Palavras-chave: Literatura vitoriana; Oscar Wilde; O Retrato de Dorian Gray; análise de personagem; Esteticismo.

ABSTRACT

The present monograph aims at presenting an investigation which proposes that Oscar Wilde has fragmented aspects of himself and his life in the three main characters of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: Lord Henry Wotton, Basil Hallward, and Dorian Gray. To attain its finality, this paper contemplated the original version of the novel in question, published in 1890, the sociocultural factors of the historical period when *Dorian Gray* was published, and an original overview of Wilde's Aesthetic and personal theoretical beliefs which was built from his essays, professional lectures, and private correspondence. Such part of the research was particularly supported by the works of biographer Richard Ellmann and also by the contributions of academics such as Andrea Selleri, whose essays on Wilde's career as a critic served as basis to help this paper find its focus in what concerned Wilde's critical legacy and its main theoretical foundations. The final analysis was conducted through the construction of parallels between excerpts of the novel and the individuality of its author, taking into account Wilde's ideas, personality, and reputation, expropriating a letter written by him on February 12, 1894, as a starting point and a supporting argument for the study.

Keywords: Victorian literature; Oscar Wilde; The Picture of Dorian Gray; character analysis; Aestheticism.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Oscar Wilde, born Oscar Fingal O’Flahertie Wills Wilde on the 16th of October, 1854, in Dublin, Ireland, is one of the most important and revered figures of English literature. Coming from a remarkable education and relying on his fascinating talents, the Irish author helped shape and crystallise the literature of Victorian era and its legacy with a bountiful body of work which encompassed all kinds of texts, but the wide repercussion of his career is principally credited to his humorous and cleverly satirical plays and to his only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The novel narrates the process of corruption of the human soul illustrated by a decaying portrait and centres the story around three main characters whose relations, philosophies, and passions trigger an unfortunate unfolding of events: Dorian Gray, Basil Hallward, and Lord Henry Wotton.

In popular culture, *Dorian Gray* is generally seen as a classic piece of Gothic literature, having earned numerous admirers for its beautiful prose, originality, and eerie plot; in academia, and more specifically amongst Wilde scholars, the novel is mostly considered as a chastising ode to Aestheticism, the artistic movement to which Wilde belonged and which preached and sought sublimeness of beauty in art above all else. Richard Ellmann, for example, one of the most respected and referenced biographers of Wilde, understands *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as a ‘critique of aestheticism’ (ELLMANN, 1988, p. 99), explaining his claim by arguing that the aestheticism incorporated into the novel is what ultimately brings Dorian to his disgrace. What is more, not only does Ellmann turn to Wilde’s aesthetic roots for an interpretation of *Dorian Gray*; he also recalls the author’s devotion to Aestheticism to delineate and justify several aspects of his life.

Ellmann’s biography, outstanding for its extensive and impressively detailed coverage of Wilde’s personal history, albeit crucial to subsequent works considering the author, has, perhaps involuntarily, helped disseminate an idea that Wilde’s aesthetic principles should be seen as the only central part of his writings. It is a fact that, to have an at least superficial technical and academic comprehension of Wilde’s work, it is necessary to understand the Aesthetic rules which he sought to follow and to apply in his texts; however, to study the intricacies of his compositions only through Aesthetic standards is to neglect Wilde’s geniality and curb the infinite layers of meanings that his words carried. Keeping the possibilities of form and interpretation of his texts within the margins of the theoretical views of Aestheticism, even though these views were fully welcomed by the author himself, is also quite confrontational to

Wilde's conviction about individuality of artistic expression, which he recurrently voiced in several of his technical and critical texts.

These works of non-fiction that Wilde wrote as a theorist, in turn, are generally referenced and explored intending to expose his legacy as a critic, which is often traced by comparing his philosophies with that of his potential theoretical influences (DANSON, 2004), for example. His theories and convictions are rarely applied to his own work, and his fiction and plays alike, and particularly *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, are mostly analysed from Aesthetic groundings. A couple of attempts have been made at bringing an authorial perspective to Wilde's works, but such endeavours have failed to approximate the figure of the author to his final text, for they mostly focused on elaborating about Wilde's views on authorial intention (SELLERI, 2018) and on observing the initial reception of his texts in the Victorian period (SELLERI, 2014), when turning to the author's biography and possible intentions was the presiding methodology to analyse a text.

Considering the facts discussed, the purpose of this paper is to conduct a study which aims to expose, based on Oscar Wilde's own theoretical views, how he could have intentionally splintered facets of himself into the three main characters of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, making them into allegories for different aspects of his own character and experiences. Such analysis proposes a brand new perspective on Wilde's only novel in that it investigates more elaborately and authentically the metaphorical layers contained in it by relating them to features of the author, in hopes to allow room to fresh and more minute understandings of the complex, paradoxical, and obscure figure that Oscar Wilde still is, as well as to comprehend how his fascinating character was vital and inherently linked to his exceptional legacy.

To attain its final aim, this monograph will conduct a study of bibliographical nature and examine important factors surrounding Wilde and *Dorian Gray* in three instalments. The first chapter will evaluate the historical, social, and cultural background of Victorian England to situate the period's literary expression, including its forms of criticism and principal literary genres, to eventually introduce Oscar Wilde and his work in relation to the historical time in question. The second chapter will draw from Wilde's critical and theoretical expressions through the perusal of his essays, private mail, and lectures to reveal how he traced and developed his ideas with enough consistency to make them into a theoretical basis for literary analysis – in particular, one that focuses on the comprehension of the authorial figure. Finally, the third and last chapter will use these theories as a foundation to guide and justify a dissection of Basil Hallward, Dorian Gray, and Lord Henry Wotton as to certificate the possibility that there are parts of Wilde metaphorically yet intentionally expressed through these characters.

2 THE VICTORIAN ERA: SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT, LITERARY CRITICISM, AND AN ABRIDGED VIEW OF LITERATURE AND READERSHIP

The present chapter will expose the historical and sociocultural scenarios of England during the Victorian era in order to properly and thoroughly assess how literature behaved and manifested itself under the characteristic circumstances of the period in question. For this to be achieved, issues such as the historical moment of England, the presiding cultural beliefs of the century, the most popular and relevant genres of the novel, and the reception and criticism of literature, principally, will be examined. Finally, this chapter will introduce the figure of Irish author Oscar Wilde and briefly discuss his role and impact in Victorian literature, in accordance with his position in the given context.

The historical period known as the Victorian era spanned the years 1837 to 1901, during which the United Kingdom was under the regency of Queen Victoria, and marks the moment when England saw its biggest and most impactful transformations, reaching the apogee of its pomp and influence. During the first fourteen years of Queen Victoria's reign, between 1837 and 1851, the British witnessed a rapid and expansive development of cities, propelled by the Industrial Revolution, which reverberated in numerous economic and social alterations. In the latter case, the most significant occurrence was the rise of the bourgeoisie, which triggered a shift in social values and English culture as a whole.

The progress of the industry was particularly advantageous to the commerce owners and manufacturers that constituted a big portion of the bourgeoisie, and because of this benefit the class progressively towered as the supreme foundation of the English society (CHASTENET, 1967). Consequently, the bourgeoisie became an all-encompassing reference to the lower classes, and their principles and thoughts soon became that of the whole nation: the infamous religiousness and moral code associated with the Victorian era ensued, principally, from them, founded on the belief that monetary success equalled divine grace. In other words, noticeably influenced by the prosperous moment in question, their faith essentially consisted of the idea that if one had an overall good and polished conduct, they would be rewarded material bliss and earn their place in Heaven. To achieve such prim comportment, it was necessary to follow a set of virtuous principles, which included the respect for the sacredness of the family life, the possession of strong work ethics, the bearing of apparent seriousness, the practice of devout religiousness, and the cultivation of the soul through the intellect.

These morally-laden bourgeois credos had been directly influenced by the ascension of young Victoria as England's new ruler (ADAMS, 2009, p. 85): once on the throne, the Queen

became the ultimate example of respectable behaviour, and such ideal stretched beyond social interaction and touched upon artistic matters; by the late 1830s, aesthetic values, for example, had become directly associated with femininity, and artistry was linked with all things tender and delicate (this ‘womanly’ influence over the arts would, in the 1840s, result in the adoption of domestic and homely themes in both prose and poetry and prompt a greater appreciation for visual arts, which until then had remained subsidiary in terms of cultural and artistic interest). The obsession over this refined, impeccable model resulted in a culture of denial, where the British public were neglectful of the underlying filth of London, refusing to address it, and where anything that could even allude to the vulgarity behind the puritanical masks, such as the drinking aristocratic habit and the clandestine prostitution points, was considered scandalous, abominable, and outrageous.

The influence of the bourgeoisie and Queen Victoria’s example in combination with this decline of consciousness of society’s faults birthed a necessity in the Victorians to cling onto stability and find ways of reaffirming their predominant social values. As reading grew as the most common leisure practice of the time, popular among lower and more affluent social classes alike, the need for moral reinforcement ultimately conferred to literature the duty of being an instructive and optimised portrayal of life, eventually establishing Realism as the favoured genre for the novel. The general public, a great part of the authors of the time (amongst which George Eliot, Charles Dickens, and the Brontë sisters may be cited), and critics all agreed to the determination that literature should serve a social purpose, assuming an identity of something that was both assertively doctrinal yet pleasant and recomforting to enjoy¹.

Naturally, this conceptualisation had its reflections on the criticism of the time, and the common central idea concerning the elaboration and the success of a novel soon started relying on its bearing or not a representation of life which befit these moralistic implications. George Eliot, one of the most acclaimed authors of the Victorian Era, and her work were paragons of the idealised fiction work, and are taken as examples by Joseph Chiders in his essay *Victorian Theories of the Novel* to illustrate how Eliot contributed to shaping both Victorian literature and literary criticism:

[...] the value of art lies precisely in its ability to connect the subjectivities of disparate beings. Her goal as a novelist was to help her readers to be better able to imagine and

¹ Although literary criticism has infinitely evolved and is nowadays seen very differently, Victorian criticism found it necessary to identify, in literary works, morally instructive tales and representations; similarly, the idea of ‘beauty’, from this perspective, was associated with the telling of stories which could serve as inspiration to the readers as far as it concerned an individual’s personal development, a strongly present concept in Victorian doctrine. The observable presence of these elements was enough for the Victorian self-called critics to evaluate a literary piece.

feel 'the pains and joys of those who are different from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling erring human creatures'. For her, in both form and content, a novel should offer a moral standard for human interaction without stooping to didacticism. For Eliot, that attention to detail was precisely what the novel calls for in its composition – since it is only then that characters and their situations are believable. (CHIDERS, 2002, p. 412).

Eliot's influence due to her success as an author imposed these conceptions of artistry and literature as an entity as fundamental in early Victorian criticism and were also instrumental to define the reputation of the 'man of letters', a recurrent figure in the Victorian Era which was essentially, in the eyes of the public and the critics, an individual, normally an academic, whose personal experiences would serve as basis to produce a morally edifying literature that would achieve the mission of inspiring the masses to follow or adopt an elevated behaviour through which the moral foundations of society were publicly met and reiterated, even if just to a superficial level.

The literary business flourished even more in the 1850s as the novel became the presiding textual form and printing became more affordable. The escalating production of printed novels and volumes of poetry and the ever-growing technological expansion of the general working industry spawned an even bigger reading public, more diverse than ever. Uniformly, starting from the 1850s, literature broke with the classic Victorian moralistic ideal of creation and began to reflect upon social issues. The success of the British progression had turned into excessive pride within the upper classes (ADAMS, 2009, p. 144-145), and authors turned to literature to raise questions against this obnoxious bourgeois self-satisfaction, as they were no longer concerned with reproducing these ideals; instead, they expected to pose questions as to what lay behind them. Amongst these revolutionary authors one may cite Charles Dickens, whose novels broached themes such as poverty and industrialisation, and Wilkie Collins, whose *The Woman in White* introduced a whole new literary genre in 1859: the sensation novel.

Sensation fiction was labelled according to its purpose: to induce, in the reader, an intense emotional, borderline sensory response. The genre was the first in the Victorian era to borrow from the 18th-century Gothic and place many of its basic concepts into contemporary settings (ADAMS, 2009, p. 201), veering its focus to themes concerning the loss of innocence and psychological distress. Aside from the inclusion of these elements in the plot, sensation fiction managed to cause the desired effect in the reading public by dealing with subjects considered immoral, such as adultery, deception, and female treachery, for the way they disrupted the delusional idealisation of the unblemished domesticity and femininity of Victorian culture. *The Woman in White* and other pioneering works, such as Mary Braddon's *Lady*

Audley's Secret (1862) and Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* (1861), were remarkably successful, but the prosperity of the genre soon started to raise concern, and by the early 1860s, Victorian readers were more guarded than ever towards the subject matter of the newly circulating novels, and the rise of a more daring literature occasioned the rise of the censure.

Concomitantly, the spread of literary publications spawned a wider circulation and readership of literary periodicals, which became responsible for formalising writing as a profession in the second half of the nineteenth century. And not only did these periodicals certify authorship as an occupation, but they also gave way to the profession of the literary critic, as the same periodicals that published serialised novels or short stories of all sorts began to also publish what would be an early form of literary criticism in the shape of literary reviews of these fictional texts. The trouble with these reviews, however, lies in the fact that they were most frequently written from a biased perspective which was normally based either on the critic's personal convictions or on the periodical's literary and publishing preferences. An additional problem is that some of the 'critics' who would write the reviews were not actual writers, nor did they have any formal literary education, and rather were academics of different areas of social studies that engaged in literary criticism once it became popular, only aggravating the already existent discrepancy of criteria for artistic evaluation as well as the divergence of ideas within the reading public. This incongruence worsened even more chaotically as new literary genres emerged and triggered the elaboration of new, yet scattered, theories of the novel (CHIDERS, 2002, p. 407).

The final decades of the Victorian years were the most prolific in terms of artistic movements and active and varied reading public. The growth of the literate audience in the 1870s multiplied the dissemination of periodicals and other forms of publishing, and this new and larger space welcomed the birth of new genres of fiction. Particularly in the 1880s, literary tendencies started to decidedly move away from Realism, as many postulations connected to Romanticism and the Gothic began to be retrieved and re-adopted for the construction of the novel. As England's progress was at its highest speed and achievements, the literary community started to feel the need for originality, and optimistic, inspiring depictions of life were replaced, in literature, by more complex plot lines and characters whose inspiration was primarily the people's anxieties before the English scientific reformation. An exemplary product of this critical moment is Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), an impactful novella unveiled through elements of the Gothic, scientific settings, and the dichotomy of morality.

Simultaneously, the 1880s saw the rise of the Aesthetic movement with the publication of literary critic Walter Hamilton's *The Aesthetic Movement in England* in 1882, an argumentative book which sought to both explore the Aesthetic theory and engage the public's interest in it. Aestheticism idealised the perfection of form through the creation of sublime beauty and understood its attainment as the pinnacle of artistry, and its quintessential representative was Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), whose critical work spanned essays, reviews, plays, and even his fictional writing and personal correspondence. Like the literary movement he followed, Oscar Wilde was the perfect spokesman for the concept of 'art for art's sake' and for the aesthetic idealisations which defended the indulgence in pleasures, beauty, and personal satisfaction.

Oscar Wilde cultivated the society of several high-profile acquaintances and respected literary communities through which he made a name for himself even before his published fiction began to circulate more widely with *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*, in 1888 (his *Poems*, published in 1881, attracted attention only of a select few, remaining quite unpopular). His social persona, eccentric personal fashion, and daring remarks granted him his reputation of a man of remarkable wit, geniality, and charm, and as his popularity grew, so did Aestheticism, challenging the then outdated conception that literature should serve a moral purpose. Aesthetes, and in particular Oscar Wilde, sought to instil in England the idea that art's only finality was to bring pleasure, and to be contemplated with pleasure, which in itself was daringly defiant of the puritan Victorian belief that engaging in personal pleasure was derogatory, as it opposed to a life in conventional accordance with others. Wilde's devotion to sensory sensations and his artistic concepts were particularly solidified before the public's eyes with the publication of *Intentions* in 1891, a collection of five essays which discussed the creation and contemplation of art (one of these essays, *The Decay of Lying*, is said by Joseph Chiders in his text *Victorian Theories of the Novel* to 'have helped to hammer the last nail into realism's coffin' (CHIDERS, 2002, p. 419)).

A year before, Wilde had originally published the serialised version of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in the July edition of the *Lippincott's Magazine* to an incendiary reception, as England had been going through a turbulent phase characterised by a rampant sense of decay which spanned the last two decades of Victoria's reign, having been chiefly prompted by the fear of change as science advanced and matters of race, gender, morality, sexuality, and religion were explored and discussed in more detail. The fact that certain niches were being segregated from conventionality caused the impression that society, as well as the empire, was regressing to a more 'primitive' state of existence and that these novelties were progressively bringing

England to its ruin. This consternation had been severely aggravated by the ‘Cleveland Street scandal’, an episode in 1889 where the police discovered a male brothel in Cleveland Street, London, which started a widespread paranoia concerning homosexuality. Still strongly associated with the feminine, the aestheticism of Wilde’s work as well as that of his own personal style and mannerisms were interpreted as allusions to homoeroticism, and *Dorian Gray* was surrounded by scandal and outrage.

Regardless of his initial controversial reception, it is unquestionable that Oscar Wilde and his work were of vital importance to shape and continue the legacy of Victorian literature due not only to their historical and cultural impact, but also to how they took the most essential concepts of Aestheticism and brought them into a higher level of originality. With *Dorian Gray*, Wilde masterfully proved that his Aesthetic foundations were tangible, infinitely rich, and perfectly grounded; his remarkably witty plays added a pleasant and amusing twitch to social critique and to the moral implications which were so esteemed by the public, and he did so with tremendous triumph; finally, his critical essays propose an entirely new, well-founded system to a collection of contemporary theories of the novel that had had little applicability and range until then. Overall, he represents the pinnacle of a literature which was, at first, completely stranded by the margins of puritanical conventionality, and which, by the end of the century and with his undeniable contribution, had evolved into one of the richest literary periods of English literature.

Based on this idea that Oscar Wilde provided significant input to theoretical and critical methodologies concerning literature, the following chapter will take the aforementioned essays, as well as other textual productions of Wilde, to explore how the perceptions they express help shape the author in question as a literary critic and theorist.

3 OSCAR WILDE'S THEORIES OF CREATION AND CRITICISM

This chapter will analyse selected excerpts from Oscar Wilde's critical essays, personal correspondence, and theoretical lectures in order to study and expose how his ideas show enough consistency to be considered a literary theory of his own. Uniformly, this chapter will situate Oscar Wilde in relation to his contemporary critics and enhance his stances and propositions regarding the figure of the author and his role in the creation of art. Finally, the delineation of Wilde's theories and artistic views will serve as basis for the final analysis proposed by this paper.

Oscar Wilde may have only formalised his identity as a critic in 1891 with the publication of *Intentions*, but the period which preceded his most prolific and successful years, from 1889 to 1895, saw him actively apply his critical ideas as he worked as a reviewer for periodicals, such as *The Pall Mall Gazette*, and also as a lecturer, the latter occupation being notorious for his activities in America in 1882, even though it was just as fertile in England. Wilde's speeches were compiled in a quite illuminating volume titled *Essays and Lectures*, published in book form for the first time in 1908, eight years after his passing. These lectures draw from Wilde's Aesthetic and Hellenic influences to express his artistic views and agree with the concepts proposed by the essays from *Intentions*, corroborating the author's consistency in terms of artistic ideals, critical patterns, and his loyalty to Aestheticism.

Amongst these speeches, a lecture delivered to art students of the Royal Academy on June 30, 1883, called attention for the way Wilde elaborates about 'what makes an artist and what does the artist make' and gives his opinion on 'what are the relations of the artist to his surroundings, [...] and what is the quality of a good work of art' (WILDE, 1908). He builds his arguments from what he terms 'the philosophy of the beautiful': an Aesthetic principle which defended that art should be self-sufficient in its own beauty and pleasantness, and that in being so it does not need to, and in fact should not, bear any pre-determined underlying meaning. Based on this, the author further asserts that art should appeal to the senses rather than to the intellect, and that its possibilities become unfairly restrained once the critic, or even the artist, tries to delimitate it in any way:

The object of art is to stir the most divine and remote of the chords which make music in our soul; [...] Am I pleading, then, for mere technique? No. As long as there are any signs of technique at all, the picture is unfinished. [...] A picture is finished when all traces of work, and of the means employed to bring about the result, have disappeared. [...] A picture has no meaning but its beauty, no message but its joy. That is the first truth about art that you must never lose sight of. A picture is purely a decorative thing. (WILDE, 1908).

Wilde also discusses the relation between the artist and his environment, similarly rejecting deterministic ideas and reinforcing that art should not serve a purpose other than the satisfaction of personal pleasures and that the artist should by all means avoid allowing external influences into his work:

[...] the relations of the artist to his surroundings, by which I mean the age and country in which he is born. All good art [...] has nothing to do with any particular century; but this universality is the quality of the work of art; the conditions that produce that quality are different. And what, I think, you should do is to realise completely your age in order to completely abstract yourself from it; remembering that if you are an artist at all, you will be not the mouthpiece of a century, but the master of eternity, [...] those who advise you to make your art representative of the nineteenth century are advising you to produce an art which your children, when you have them, will think old-fashioned. (WILDE, 1908).

Wilde was able to engage in criticism early in his literary career thanks to a rich and highly encouraged academic formation at Portora Royal School, Trinity College, and Magdalen College at Oxford, which made him notoriously versed in topics related to literary theory and philosophical thinking. Biographer Richard Ellmann comments that, at Trinity College, where he studied from 1871 to 1874, Wilde could be ‘seen slowly accumulating [...] the elements of his Oxford behavior – his Pre-Raphaelite sympathies, his dandiacal dress, his Hellenic bias, his ambiguous sexuality, his contempt for conventional morality’ (ELLMANN, 1988, p. 34), which was likely consequential of the author’s outstanding performance in reading, remarkably expressive since his Portora years, in addition to his participation in various college courses whose subjects focused specifically on aesthetics, ancient history, and philosophy. His time at Oxford, spanning the years 1874 to 1878, helped him deepen convictions he had been acquiring thus far and expand his range of influences:

While at Oxford he kept a Commonplace Book in which the range of reference is wide. [...] he was on easy terms not only with Plato and Aristotle, as required by his course, but with Kant, Hegel, Jacobi, Locke, Hume, Berkeley, and Mill. He alludes knowledgeably to Alfieri and quotes Baudelaire [...] and he characteristically draws together contemporary and classical concerns, [...]. The headings in the Commonplace Book invoke abstractions such as Culture, Progress, Slavery, Metaphysics, and Poetry, as if he already saw the need for taking positions on these matters. Questions of art and artistic attitudes are a common theme. He writes about beauty as a believer about God [...]. (ELLMANN, 1988, p. 40-41).

Arguably, this Commonplace Book would have served as a draft for numerous matters which Wilde would posteriorly discuss in his critical and theoretical essays from *Intentions*, which provided supplementary discussion of the postulations proposed by him in his lectures during the 1880s. Amongst these essays, *The Critic as Artist* is the one that best elucidates some of the author’s most central ideas in terms of literary criticism, many of which are woven into some

of his other writings, including *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and his private letters. In this essay, Wilde covers matters of criticism and creation and elaborates, through a dialogue between two fictional characters, a discussion around principles which remained unwaveringly consistent to him since his college days, in spite of his well-known paradoxical nature and sometimes contradictory statements.

One of the most important ideas proposed in *The Critic as Artist* is what Wilde calls the ‘artistic temperament’, sometimes also referred to as the artistic ‘mood’, a concept which is present in several of his other writings and to which Wilde returns every time he speaks of what he deemed to be the ideal origins of art. This temperament, according to the characters who serve as tools to voice Wilde’s own thoughts, would be necessary not only for the artist in his process of creation, but also for the literary critic:

Temperament is the primary requisite for the critic – a temperament exquisitely susceptible to beauty, and to the various impressions that beauty gives us. [...] there is in us a beauty-sense, separate from the other senses and above them, separate from the reason and of nobler import, separate from the soul and of equal value – a sense that leads some to create, and others, the finer spirits as I think, to contemplate merely. But to be purified and made perfect, this sense required some form of exquisite environment. [...] Insensibly, and without knowing the reason why, he is to develop the real love of beauty which [...] is the true aim of education. By slow degrees there is to be engendered in him such a temperament as will lead him naturally and simply to choose the good in preference to the bad, and, rejecting what is vulgar and discordant, to follow by fine instinctive taste all that possesses grace and charm and loveliness. [...] Certainly, for the cultivation of temperament, we must turn to the decorative arts: to the arts that touch us, not to the arts that teach us. (WILDE, 1891).

It is also observable, through this passage, that Wilde believed that the true critic (‘the aesthetic critic’, as he specifies in some passages of the essay), in order to appropriately recognise and assess art, should be conditioned to a quite particular type of perspective which, as theorised by the author, would naturally evoke the artistic temperament. In another essay titled *Pen, Pencil and Poison*, the author reiterates these thoughts and explains that such perspective is possible to achieve, and ultimately refine, through ‘frequent contact with the best work’ (WILDE, 1891), and that once the artistic temperament is attained and perfected, it becomes the correct form of judgement – the *only* correct form of judgment, in fact, as previously explained.

The belief that the artistic temperament was imperative and indispensable for the adequate performance of an art critic caused Wilde to become personally judgmental towards his contemporary literary reviewers, credible to the fact that these critics’ ideas differed completely from the author’s Aesthetic convictions, and whilst he did not completely condemn them in writings such as the essays from *Intentions*, his letters in response to or about criticism revealed a rather hostile disposition. In *The Critic as Artist*, for example, he writes that ‘The

true critic will [...] always be sincere in his devotion to the principle of beauty’, adding: ‘but he will seek for beauty in every age and each school, and will never suffer himself to be limited to any settled custom of thought or stereotyped mode of looking at things’ (WILDE, 1891). This was something impossible to sustain in an age ruled by moralistic ideals that dictated very narrow-minded patterns of publication and when most of the self-titled literary critics often were but common readers whose strong personal contentions acted as theoretical foundations. Wilde was especially expressive about his discontentment towards these erroneous standards in a letter to the editor of the *St James’s Magazine* on February 25th, 1892, in response to an article from that day’s issue that claimed he could have made alterations in his play *Lady Windermere’s Fan* ‘in consequence of the criticism of some journalists who write very recklessly and very foolishly in the papers about dramatic art’ (WILDE, 1979, p. 104):

When criticism becomes in England a real art, as it should be, and when none but those of artistic instinct and artistic cultivation is allowed to write about works of art, artists will no doubt read criticisms with a certain amount of intellectual interest. As things are at present, the criticisms of ordinary newspapers are of no interest whatsoever, [...]. (WILDE, 1979, p. 104).

Wilde’s personal feud with critical backlash and fallacies had begun with the original publication of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in the July issue of the *Lippincott’s Magazine*, in 1890. Met by infuriated reviewers whose indignation was fundamentally triggered by the novel’s controversial homoerotic subtext, Wilde responded to a select number of criticism and drew from his Aesthetic footings to divert the attention that was then being directed to the alleged scandalous insinuations of the novel. Recalling once again the necessity to separate art from artist and his reality, Wilde vehemently argued that it would be impossible to criticise a work of art from a moralistic perspective, for ‘The sphere of art and the sphere of ethics are absolutely distinct and separate’, as he wrote to the editor of the *St James’s Gazette* on June 25, 1890 (WILDE, 2019). Later, on August 13, he wrote to the editor of the *Scots Observer*,

If a man sees the artistic beauty of a thing, he will probably care very little for its ethical import. If his temperament is more susceptible to ethical than to aesthetic influences, he will be blind to questions of style, treatment and the like. [...] You may ask me, Sir, why should I care to have the ethical beauty of my story recognised. I answer, Simply because it exists, because the thing is there. (WILDE, 2019).

Wilde’s conceptualisations concerning artistic occupations naturally encompass authorship and envision an author who is in possession not only of the artistic temperament, but also of a strong consciousness of intention. He argues in *The Critic as Artist*, that ‘all fine imaginative work is self-conscious and deliberate’ and ‘the longer one studies life and literature, the more strongly one feels that behind everything that is wonderful stands the individual’

(WILDE, 1891), restating his conviction that the individual – the artist – should not be subjected to the influence of his reality when creating art. Even though he generally dismissed the idea of turning to the author as a foundation to criticism or a starting point to trace the origins of and investigate an artwork, here he unequivocally poses the importance of that figure under meticulously specific terms: that the author is to be taken into consideration as far as his geniality is observable not through his life and actions, but through the quality and impact of his art.

Still regarding artistic manufacturing, in *The Critic as Artist* he defines that technique ‘is really personality’ (WILDE, 1891), which could be interpreted, principally, in two ways: that technique is represented by the singular characteristics of a work of art that is complete and independent within itself, or that technique is the personality of the author moulded in accordance with the artistic temperament. The latter possibility would be more plausible, considering that Wilde adds to that consideration claiming that, being personality, technique could not be taught or learnt, though it could and should be recognised by the aesthetic critic (WILDE, 1891). That should be sufficient to argue that, although Wilde defended the need of certain specific circumstances for the artist to create, he also believed that said circumstances should ultimately result in an individual and original artistic style.

Although several scholars see Wilde’s ideas as a budding version of what would later become the 20th century Russian Formalism (SELLERI, 2018, p. 51), Wilde’s thesis goes far deeper and is entirely unique; his concept of the author is particularly complex as it mingles the independence of the artwork from its author with extremely specific and distinct abilities, as Wilde clearly defined the range of the author’s talents as of vital importance to the quality of a piece of art. Thus, he proposes a perspective that remains completely singular, where author and text are brought into a unity in which one part does not belittle or discard the other; rather, they depend on each other for validation and completion.

Wilde’s view of the author envisioned an individual who is characteristically capricious and self-indulgent, which is reflected by his own process of creation, including his preferred context for it and the goals and purposes he assigns to an artwork. ‘I am sorry’, he wrote to English actor George Alexander in February 1891, ‘but artistic work can’t be done unless one is in the mood; certainly my work can’t’ (WILDE, 1979, p. 90); in a separate letter, he comments on how this ‘mood’, according to his convictions, was to be transmitted through the final work:

[...] Art is useless because its aim is simply to create a mood. It is not meant to instruct, or to influence action in any way. It is superbly sterile, and the note of its

pleasure is sterility. If the contemplation of a work of art is followed by activity of any kind, the work is either of a very second-rate order, or the spectator has failed to realise the complete artistic impression. (WILDE, 1979, p. 95-96).

All in all, Wilde's theories propose an idea capable of enriching the literary experience and which shine an authentic light on criticism unlocking numerous possibilities of interpretation, amongst which stands the segmentation of the author, as well as of his experiences or thoughts, into fictional characters. Bearing in mind that Wilde's bountiful and extensive academic formation endowed him with great confidence about his multiform abilities, relying on his own theoretical and critical views supplies enough basis to analyse his work from the point of view which he would have deemed the most appropriate.

The next chapter will use these considerations as a starting point and a theoretical foundation to analyse the potential fragmentation of Oscar Wilde into the three main characters of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: Basil Hallward, Lord Henry Wotton, and Dorian Gray. This analysis will take into account the original, *Lippincott's* version of the novel, and will draw from Wilde's theories to support the hypothesis that proposes the three aforementioned characters as different facets of their author.

4 OSCAR WILDE FRAGMENTED INTO BASIL HALLWARD, LORD HENRY WOTTON, AND DORIAN GRAY IN THE ORIGINAL VERSION OF *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY*

Now that Oscar Wilde's theoretical views have been discussed with emphasis on how they help validate the authorial figure in the process of creation, the present chapter will defend and exemplify how such foundations are enough to recognise, in the three main characters of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, as well as in other elements of the novel, different sides of the author's identity. To achieve that, this chapter will firstly trace the differences between the original version of the novel and the book version of 1891; then, it will consider Wilde's ideas, personality, social reputation, and a few of his biographical events, taking as a starting point a letter written by him on February 12, 1894, to finally proceed to analysing selected excerpts from *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by comparing the characters with aspects of Oscar Wilde's own persona.

When *The Picture of Dorian Gray* first appeared in the *Lippincott's Magazine*, in 1890, it had suffered several textual alterations unbeknown to its author and which did not match the original typescript submitted to publication, as J. M. Stoddard, the *Lippincott's* editor, likely with aid from his assistants, decided to remove what amounted to circa 500 words, some of which composed entire sentences. Such suppression was deemed necessary by Stoddard, who was afraid that the novel's explicit homoerotic subtext would upset the reading public and, consequently, be detrimental to the magazine's reputation; similarly, punctuation and spelling details were also adjusted to fit the publication standards (FRANKEL, 2012, p. 37-40). After these adaptations, *Dorian Gray* was finally published as a 13-chapter novel. Wilde would only be acquainted with Stoddard's revisions after the novel had already been serialised.

Closely after the *Lippincott's* publication, Wilde started editing *Dorian Gray* for its book format, enlarging it to a twenty-chapter volume. In doing so, he had to take into consideration the infuriated reviews which condemned and insulted the novel for its homosexual connotations, still evident in spite of Stoddard's attempts to minimise them. This resulted in a 'highly coded' (FRANKEL, 2012, p. 9-10) version of *Dorian Gray* which addressed homosexual attraction and focused on romantic connotations less openly, having suffered modifications which not only acquiesced to the reading public, but also helped protect Wilde, who by then had already made a well-known and respected name for himself as an author, from potential scandals and malicious allegations.

This second, more conservative, and far less original version of *Dorian Gray* was the one perpetrated throughout the decades, the first published transcription of the original 1890 typescript having occurred only in 2011, with an edition titled *The Picture of Dorian Gray: An Annotated, Uncensored Edition* (FRANKEL, 2012, p. 21). Although it is understandable how and why Oscar Wilde was forcefully conditioned to alter his work, it is also undeniable that these alterations created a type of abyss between the novel and its author, robbing both of the originality they proposed; likewise, it is probable that, simply because Wilde consented to making such adaptations, it does not necessarily mean that he was personally compliant and satisfied with them, especially considering how he prized the freedom of individual artistic expression. These things considered, the idea suggested by this paper is that it is distinctly possible that Wilde spoke of the original typescript version of *Dorian Gray* when he wrote to a man named Ralph Payne on February 12, 1894, about his novel, ‘I am so glad you like that strange coloured book of mine: it contains much of me in it. Basil Hallward is what I think I am: Lord Henry what the world thinks me: Dorian what I would like to be – in other ages, perhaps’ (WILDE, 1979, p. 116).

Although Wilde often defended author and artwork as two separate entities, it is interesting to consider that he mostly did so in public and formal statements, such as his lectures and responses to periodical reviewers, as seen in the previous chapter. Moreover, at the same time that he believed that the final product of art should be independent from its creator, as well as from any external factor for that matter, he was adamant in his stance that the artist should be in possession of the ‘artistic temperament’ to succeed, and being the artistic temperament a matter of personality, the idea hence implies and proposes that the artist as an individual was of direct and subjective influence over art. In this regard, Wilde’s claiming in his private correspondence that *Dorian Gray* contains much of his own self, and thus alluding to having put his particularities of character and experiences into Dorian Gray, Lord Henry Wotton, and Basil Hallward, seems much more credible than any open declaration that aimed at detaching his life from his fiction.

Lord Henry, for example, is an obvious caricature of Wilde’s public image: he is witty, cynical, well-educated, hedonistic, and his remarks, often extensive, come from a rather nihilistic perspective. As a character, he embodies and exaggerates all the principal traits Wilde cultivated with his social repute, quite principally characterised by his quick tongue and intelligent observations, as well as his broad arsenal of academic knowledge. Richard Ellmann, in his biography of Wilde, wrote that ‘Through carelessness, impatience, or whim, Wilde sometimes forgot that his characters should always carry aestheticism to excess, and allowed

them to articulate his own sentiments' (ELLMANN, 1988, p. 318): that is precisely what happens to the character of Lord Henry, as he is the one who most recurrently and thoroughly voices Wilde's philosophical divagations throughout the novel, as exemplified by the passage:

I believe that if one man were to live his life out 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 [...] The body sins one, and has done with its sin, for the 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. (WILDE, 2012, p. 74).

That, however, unlike Ellmann suggests, does not inevitably mean that Lord Henry does not fit or incorporate Aestheticism. Like certain Aesthetic principles, the character stands for self-indulgence and does not take moralistic perceptions into matters; rather, he defends and instructs Dorian Gray to chase his pleasures and desires in spite of moralism and for the sole purpose of obtaining personal delight, which is, essentially, just a paraphrased and perhaps metaphorical way to express the theory of 'art for art's sake'. In a conversation with Basil Hallward, Henry comments that 'the costume of our day is detestable. It is so sombre, so depressing. Sin is the only colour-element left in modern life' (WILDE, 2012, p. 85); although 'sin', in this context, had many possible interpretations at the time of the novel's publication and was ultimately associated with homosexuality, it is far more possible that Wilde meant 'sin' in the sense of individual satisfaction and the pursuit thereof, considering that such act was condemned by the puritanical Victorian culture as a case of immorality, and therefore understood as sinful. A further indication that Henry does, indeed, voice Wilde's aesthetic footings occurs when he says to Dorian, 'You have a wonderfully beautiful face, Mr Gray. [...] And Beauty is a form of Genius, is higher indeed than Genius, as it needs no explanation' (WILDE, 2012, p. 78), reinforcing Aestheticism's conviction that beauty, as an entity, stands at a higher and more valuable position than other factors.

In direct agreement to what has been explained above, there is the incontestable fact of how some of Henry's discourses make a parallel with Wilde's own theoretical and critical claims, for example:

[...] to influence a person is to give him one's own soul. He does not think his natural thoughts, or burn with his natural passions. His virtues are not real to him. His sins, if there are such things as sins, are borrowed. He becomes an echo of some one else's music, an actor of a part that has not been written for him. The aim of life is self-

development. To realise one's nature perfectly – that is what each of us is here for. (WILDE, 2012, p. 73-74).

The given utterance, situated in a dialogue between Henry and Dorian Gray, sounds remarkably similar to the idea Wilde expressed when he wrote to the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, in February 1886, that 'To tell people what to read is, as a rule, either useless or harmful; for the appreciation of literature is a question of temperament, not of teaching' (WILDE, 1979, p. 65), as well as when he addressed an unidentified man named R. Clegg in April 1891 with the previously commented statement in which he defends that art's only objective is 'to create a mood', and not to regulate or encourage any type of attitude (WILDE, 1979, p. 95-96). That Lord Henry, in the passage above, is simply paraphrasing and embellishing what his author had already said in private conversations a few years before and would say again just a few months after *Dorian Gray's* original publication is, therefore, easily concluded, and this is one of the instances of the novel and the parallels between art and artist that help support the theory that Wilde could have purposefully fragmented bits of his thoughts and personality into the characters of his only novel.

Following such thought, we understand that when Wilde wrote that Lord Henry was what the world thought of him, he could be alluding to or proposing the negative influence Henry has over Dorian by encouraging the latter to pursue his whims as a symbolic representation of how numerous people frowned upon Wilde's own lifestyle, especially due to the rumours surrounding his sexuality and the fact that he notoriously sought to lead his life in agreement to his Aesthetic credos. Lord Henry personifies capricious instincts at the same time that he shines a philosophically sceptical light on them, rationalising (yet validating) the aesthetic motifs that, as it will be discussed later, Dorian Gray incorporates. Dorian even says of Henry that he 'spends his days in saying what is incredible, and his evenings in doing what is improbable' (WILDE, 2012, p. 146), allowing the reader to understand that, in the novel, the character cultures an obscure reputation that is very alike to that of his author at the time that novel was devised. In such sense, amongst the three main characters of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Lord Henry is the one that most accurately mirrors Wilde's social repute and best vocalises and represents the more superficial and non-secretive traits of the author's mind and personality.

Basil Hallward, the painter responsible for the creation of Dorian's portrait, is, in Wilde's words, the character to whom the author thinks he is most alike, potentially due to how both are artists who preserve strong relationships with their artwork, or because both are moved and inspired by beauty in their processes of creation (Wilde by Aestheticism, Hallward by

Dorian Gray). As a literary device analysed through comparison with his author, Hallward's symbolism is manifold and can be discussed from several perspectives; there are, however, two major possibilities of interpretation of the character and of his role in the story that seem to be the most concrete: Hallward can be seen as an allegory for Wilde's concept of the 'artistic temperament' and as an expression of his sexuality.

Basil Hallward personifies Wilde's theory of the artistic temperament in that he represents the ideal Aesthetic artist: he is described by the narrator as a man in possession of a 'nature that was purely feminine in its tenderness' (WILDE, 2012, p. 141), for example, which retrieves the early Victorian idea of Aestheticism being associated with femininity; similarly, Hallward is extremely concerned with the beauty of and the sensation put into and caused by his work, as can be inferred from his speech to Lord Henry,

Harry, [...] 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 coloured canvas, reveals himself. The reason I will not exhibit this picture is that I am afraid that I have shown with it the secret of my soul. (WILDE, 2012, p. 61).

Whilst this might seem contradictory to Wilde's insistence that the final product of art should be independent from its creator and external factors, it is also easily arguable that Hallward's devotion to his art and his fear that he might have put too much of himself into it speaks for Wilde's theory of how the artist must be subjected to a specific type of artistic and aesthetic mood in order to create. Because of that, Hallward's pouring himself and his sentiments into the painting converses with the verification of Wilde's idea, discussed in the previous chapter, that the artist's individuality matters to the final artwork.

Intricately connected to Hallward's artistic facet, we have his bringing forth Wilde's sexual identity through his infinite devotion to Dorian Gray. Although his romantic and sexual attraction to Dorian is only covertly expressed for most of the novel, the subtext in the painter's own words to and about the young man is not subtle whatsoever, becoming enough for the reader to infer that his feelings went beyond mere friendship, as Hallward quite explicitly confessed:

It is quite true that I have worshipped you with far more romance of feeling than a man should ever give to a friend. Somehow, I had never loved a woman. [...] Well, from the moment I met you, your personality had the most extraordinary influence over me. I quite admit that I adored you madly, extravagantly, absurdly. I was jealous of every one to whom you spoke. I wanted to have you all to myself. I was only happy when I was with you. When I was away from you, you were still present in my art. It was all wrong and foolish still. Of course I never let you know anything about this. [...] You would not have understood it; I did not understand it myself. One day I determined to paint a wonderful portrait of you, worked at it, every flake and film of

colour seemed to me to reveal my secret. There was love in every line, and in every touch there was passion. I grew afraid that the world would know of my idolatry. I felt, Dorian, that I had told too much. (WILDE, 2012, p. 144).

Earlier in the novel, he also fairly romantically describes his first encounter with Dorian Gray as a deeply impactful moment for him, and again mentions his marvel at Dorian's personality. He claims that it was 'mad' of him to ask for the hostess of the party they were at to introduce them to each other, but then quickly adds that 'Perhaps it was not so mad, after all. It was simply inevitable. We would have spoken to each other without any introduction' (WILDE, 2012, p. 63). The indulgence of these words and thoughts and the scenario of the encounter are elements which discourse directly with Wilde's reality in what concerns his strongly whimsical nature and his continuously preserved company of young men from high society throughout his life and career.

Richard Ellmann writes that, by the time of *Dorian Gray's* original formulation and publication, Wilde had already fully come to terms with his sexuality and acted on it multiple times, and that his transition from being an ideal husband to living out his sexual desires had started around 1885. He indicates that Wilde began expressing a 'disaffection from his wife' which was observable through an 'eagerness' to 'return to the society of young men' (ELLMANN, 1988, p. 267). Wilde did not feel guilty, neither about his orientation nor about his affairs, and Basil Hallward himself states that 'there was nothing evil in it, nothing shameful' (WILDE, 2012, p. 188) about the amount of emotion he transmitted through his painting when Dorian accuses him of putting his 'romance' in it; that he would have written his homosexual experiences into *Dorian Gray* and particularly into Basil Hallward without any contrition seems, therefore, quite plausible. In conclusion, Hallward represents a softer and brighter side of Wilde's own desires through the metaphor of a painter in love with his subject and his artwork, much like the pleasure Wilde took from his own affairs with the young men of his life.

Dorian Gray also is majorly presented as an allegory for Wilde's sexuality. Although many scholars have pointed him as an expression of Wilde's guilt about his extramarital affairs due to how Dorian's unchastity ultimately dooms him to a disgraceful fate, it is imperative to consider that the path that led the character to his downfall did not consist solely of debauchery, but of other vices and crimes as well. It is equally important to remember that, from a theoretical and artistic perspective, Dorian Gray's purpose is supposedly to personify Aestheticism itself, as he, like Aestheticism's philosophies, possesses a purity of beauty and lives solely for the pursuit of his own desires.

This embodiment of Aestheticism is likely one of the things to which Wilde could be referring when he wrote that Dorian Gray is what he would like to be, even if in another time. Wilde's devotion to the movement was such that it transcended literature, and the author often sought the applicability of his Aesthetic convictions not only in his writing, but also in his real life and self-image. As explained by Richard Ellmann,

Wilde had been much concerned with images. He had painted self-portrait after self-portrait: at Trinity College he experimented with a beard, then shaved it off; he let his hair grow long at Oxford and had it waved, then in Paris had it cut and curled Roman-style, then let it grow long again. His clothing also passed through transformations: dandiacal in London, it became *outré* in America, elaborately decorous afterwards. No wonder he spoke often about poses and masks. [...] He was moved [...] to construct an artistic world in which to live artistically, and he spoke approvingly in 'Pen, Pencil and Poison' of life as art. He disagreed with those who called him artificial. He thought of the self as having multiple possibilities, and of his life as manifesting each of this in turn. (ELLMANN, 1988, p. 311).

Wilde believed in living through appearances, even though the hypocrisy thereof was often central in several of the social critiques which he put into his short stories, plays, and more. He believed that people existed through a masked version of themselves created by an idealistic vision of they wanted or should be, and in his case, he wanted to surround himself by art and by pleasure, and daringly, wanted to live, to be art himself. Dorian Gray lives his pleasures to the fullest, he is ethereally beautiful, and, in a sense, he does become art himself, as he is eternalised in Basil's portrait as a perennially rosy-cheeked, beautiful young man. From this viewpoint, he can be appointed as an expression of what Wilde wished he could be or attain, and following this interpretation, when Wilde wrote, 'in other times, perhaps', it is possible to conclude that he was referring to a time when Aestheticism and its propositions could be better seen or better accepted than they were amidst the puritanism of Victorian era.

A second possibility of interpretation for Wilde's connection with Dorian Gray is seen through Dorian's affairs with older and younger men alike. Having studied and mastered the Greek classics from a very young age, Wilde was perfectly familiar with the art and culture of this historical period, and one of the most generally and popularly known facts about the Hellenics, which is possibly the one with the greatest and most perceptible influence over implied events from *Dorian Gray*, is how they not only accepted homosexual male relationships, but also encouraged them. Dorian Gray establishes an ambiguous relationship with Lord Henry, a man ten years his senior, and although for most of the novel it is easy and natural to perceive them only as good friends, Henry's impact on Dorian is very similar to Dorian's impact on Basil, which instils the idea that Dorian forms a connection with Henry which surpasses platonic feeling. One of the passages from the novel that best exemplifies how

Dorian Gray developed an emotional and psychological dependency on Lord Henry occurs when he tells the latter about his sudden passion for Sybil Vane, an actress with whom he falls in love in the novel: ‘You know how a voice can stir one. Your voice and the voice of Sybil Vane are two things that I shall never forget. When I close my eyes, I hear them, and each of them says something different. I don’t know which to follow’ (WILDE, 2012, p. 94). Hypothetically, this passage even agrees, although metaphorically, with what Ellmann said about Wilde’s gradual distancing from his wife because of his affairs, but above all it certainly indicates that Lord Henry was, to Dorian Gray, on the same level of importance, relevance, and intensity of emotion as was Sybil Vane, who is openly portrayed as Dorian’s love interest in the story.

Another important figure of the book is the narrator, through which Wilde also speaks. Whilst some of the narrator’s speeches are very similar to Wilde’s own theorisations in his essays and lectures, the narrator often works as a stream of consciousness of Dorian Gray as the latter gradually starts reflecting upon ‘the worship of senses’ (WILDE, 2012, p. 161), ‘a new Hedonism that was to recreate life, and to save it from that harsh, uncomely puritanism that is having [...] its curious revival’ (WILDE, 2012, p. 162), ‘the canons of society’ and ‘the canons of art’ (WILDE, 2012, p. 174), amongst other things, as he descends into his lavish and lustful practices. Even though the narrative is not always exclusive to Dorian’s sensory and philosophical musings, the narrator delves far deeper into his conscience than into that of the other characters, and therefore it is nearly impossible to understand this entity in disconnection from the character, and vice-versa. This interrelation between Dorian Gray and the narrator is supportive of the interpretation which suggests the character as Aestheticism incarnate, particularly because, when the narrator speaks for Dorian Gray, he formulates his pondering by drawing from ideas directly linked to what is preached by Aesthetic values.

It is absolutely crucial to state that proposing such analyses of the characters as instances of the author’s truth does not, by any means, belittle either novel or artistic talent. Rather, to understand that Oscar Wilde split his manifold and multi-coloured facets into elements of his only novel, which stands today as one of the most prized and exquisite works of Victorian fiction and English literature in general, agrees with the author’s chameleonic nature and proposes a perspective which enriches the contact with Wilde’s prose. Although Dorian Gray, Basil Hallward, and Lord Henry already are infinitely vivid as products of fiction, to find these parallels between them and Wilde offers new alternatives of understanding both author and work at a deeper level, which is imperative for anyone who wishes to study the life or the art of one of the most mysterious and fascinating figures of English literature.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Seeking to trace and validate the possibility of identifying Oscar Wilde's individuality in the three main characters of his only novel, this paper has studied the literature of Victorian era under its social and historical context, assessed the theoretical foundations of Oscar Wilde, and analysed the symbolism contained in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in relation to its authorial background. The three chapters contained in this monograph have been of fundamental support to each other in that each provided the necessary contextual information to formulate the next and develop the research.

The first chapter delineated an abridged timeline of the literary activity of the Victorian era and highlighted elements and events that eventually led to the rise of Aestheticism, the movement to which Wilde's literature belongs. This panorama was essential to sustain, by the end of the chapter, the introduction of Wilde's authorship, popularity, and social repute, which were, in turn, situated and explained by his academic background and specific historical events.

The second chapter drew from Wilde's theoretical texts to establish him as a writer of literary criticism and theory. This speculation of Wilde's hypotheses presented was necessary due to two main reasons: firstly, to be able to trace a line of interpretation and analyses which would be justifiable according to the author's own ideas, thus becoming more naturally ratified; secondly, to obtain an original yet feasible basis on which to support the analysis proposed by the third and final chapter. The most relevant point found and described by the second chapter was Oscar Wilde's concept of the 'artistic temperament', which essentially defended that an artist's subjectivity, as far as it concerned his individual contact with art and his artistic ability (or lack thereof), was decisive to the quality of the final artwork. Whilst elaborating on this idea, the section also found that such theory was entirely original in terms of proposed methodology of artistic assessment, especially in comparison to Wilde's contemporary reviewers and critics. This second instalment of the monography was also successful in delineating other critical concepts suggested by Wilde so that they could be viewed and understood as a complete theoretical basis which would be possible to use in the final analysis.

The third and last chapter of this study concerned the examination of the three main characters of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: Basil Hallward, Lord Henry Wotton, and Dorian Gray. The analysis was based on a letter Wilde wrote claiming that the characters were different versions of himself, and it was managed through the scrutiny of symbolism contained in the characters and their discourses. The principal aim of the chapter was to demonstrate how these potential metaphors could be explained by facts related to Oscar Wilde's thoughts, feelings,

theories, and biographical events, constantly bearing in mind his personal claim that the book contained a lot of his own particularities. The interpretations that the chapter reached as final conclusions understood and defended that Lord Henry Wotton expresses Wilde's social repute, especially in what concerns his witty reputation, and voiced Wilde's more superficial and sceptical thoughts, vocalising more openly than the other characters the author's rational side; Basil Hallward was defined as a positive manifestation of Wilde's homosexuality and also as an allegory for the artistic temperament he conceptualised; finally, Dorian Gray was argued to having been split into two possibilities: a depiction of Aestheticism incarnate and a metaphor to what Wilde desired to achieve as an individual.

The final analysis was successful in plausibly relating Oscar Wilde to the characters of his only novel whilst respecting the boundaries of the author's theories and the possibilities of *Dorian Gray* as an artwork complete in itself and full of various other justifiable interpretations. Besides the meanings conferred to the characters, which was the culmination of the research done for this paper and its principal objective, the most relevant conclusion offered by the final chapter was that to turn to the authorial figure, in the case of Wilde and *Dorian Gray*, does not invalidate neither Wilde's talents, nor the intricacies of the novel as a work of fiction; instead, the perspective suggested by this research converses with most, if not all, of Wilde's personal predilections in terms of literary theory and criticism, since it was fundamentally based on his writings of such nature.

The fact that Oscar Wilde has produced a considerable number of well-elaborated theoretical texts is unquestionably worth of attention, especially given his success as a writer of multiple different genres. Recalling what has been said in the introduction to this paper about the lack of innovative procedures of analysis of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the viewpoint of study proposed by this monograph offers new possibilities of research which bring author and artwork together in a fashion that is not commonly considered by most academics or literary theories and theorists, but that has the potential of encompassing the understanding of works other than Wilde's.

Oscar Wilde has proved himself a masterful storyteller in infinite instances, as his remarkable legacy may corroborate; this paper hopes to have proved him an equally brilliant literary theorist and critic, and above all a rare individual whose nuances were as vibrant and as full of possibilities as his cryptic only novel. Hopefully, new studies will be conducted seeking to understand his bibliography from other fresh and inventive perspectives so that Wilde's legacy can live on, evoking in his public the same sense of infinite beauty and possibilities that he believed life possessed.

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