



**HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS**

Hugvísindasvið

***Oscar Wilde's Use of the Faustian Bargain,  
Victorian Narrative Traditions and Aestheticism  
in The Picture of Dorian Gray***

**Ritgerð til BA-prófs ensku**

**Dagmar Magnadóttir**

**Janúar 2015**

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Enskuskor

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## Summary

The only novel by Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was one of the most controversial works of 19th century Britain. This time in Britain, known as the Victorian age, was no place for an artist like Wilde. The controversy over the novel was both because it displayed homosexual relationships and also because it departed from realist narrative traditions that promoted positive self-development stories. These kinds of realist stories are usually known as coming of age stories portraying the progression of a character's maturity. Also known by the German word *Bildungsroman*, they usually had a happy ending.

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* draws on a wide range of themes and sources both from Wilde's own life and from already established literary devices. This essay focuses on how Oscar Wilde used different themes such as Aestheticism, the Gothic, the doppelganger and especially the Faustian bargain as the basis of the novel. Therefore it shows that the novel can be interpreted on many levels. Also it will discuss why the publication of *Dorian Gray* was not well-received by the critics. This essay will also look at the doppelganger theme in the *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and compare the two works. By incorporating the Faustian bargain into the text, Wilde splits the novel into two parts which allows all of these themes to work together. By melding all of these themes together Wilde constructs a novel much like many realist novelists did. The novel can be interpreted as an attack on realism in literature as Wilde fashions a modern view of the coming of age stories because he does not include a happy ending for the protagonist. Within this context, *Dorian Gray* can be approached from different thematic traditions but ultimately can be interpreted as a reverse coming of age story of a narcissistic character.

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## Introduction

The novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is the first and only novel by Oscar Wilde. It follows the story of Dorian Gray, a young aristocrat whose beauty is compared to that of Adonis, the Greek god of beauty. The story begins with Basil Hallward, a painter, and his friend Lord Henry. While Basil paints a portrait of Dorian Gray, Lord Henry tells him about his new philosophy which he calls new Hedonism. This new Hedonism is a way towards self-development in which “beauty and youth are among the highest values” (Kohl 143). The finished painting of Dorian is so beautiful that Dorian is dismayed to realise that he will grow old yet the picture will remain beautiful. Dorian then makes a simple wish that he could stay forever young and that instead the portrait would become ugly and old. Shortly after Dorian’s and Lord Henry’s first encounter, Dorian falls in love with an actress, Sibyl Vane. Dorian invites Lord Henry and Basil to one of her performances. However, her performance is awful that night, much to Dorian’s disappointment. Dorian breaks up with Sibyl who is devastated to the point that she kills herself. Dorian returns home that same night and notices a slight change in the portrait of himself. The day after he hears about Sibyl’s death he seeks consolation from Lord Henry who callously dismisses her death. Lord Henry then gives Dorian a secret yellow handbook that influences Dorian for the next 18 years. During that time rumours swirl around London about Dorian’s lifestyle and “destructive influence on his friends and acquaintances” (Kohl 144). Basil tries to talk to his old friend about these rumours but Dorian dismisses them and shows Basil his portrait. Basil is horrified by the sight of the picture and his “biblical calls for repentance” (144), all of which make Dorian furious. Dorian then murders Basil and has his friend Alan Campbell dispose of Basil’s body. After the murder of Basil, Dorian is constantly haunted by the portrait to the point that he seeks refuge in opium dens in London. However, James Vane, Sibyl’s brother, finds Dorian and tries to avenge his sister’s death. Dorian manages to escape him. Shortly after their altercation, Dorian retreats to his estate, Shelby Royal. James finds Dorian there and is then killed in a hunting accident. After this, Dorian is desperate to start a new and noble life as he realises he has become excessively corrupt. In a final act of desperation he stabs the portrait of himself. A cry is heard from Dorian’s chamber and his servants rush to the room where they find a dead man with a knife in his heart. The man is their master who is ugly and wrinkled, but they also find a beautiful painting of their master in his youthful prime.

Oscar Wilde was one of the most controversial authors of the 19th century. The

*Picture of Dorian Gray* was not well received by the critics and the book was seen as immoral because it displayed homosexual relationships. The novel also broke away from the style of Victorian literature because of its opposition to “the common Victorian heresy of the Didactic” (Kohl 120). Realism in literature was the dominant literary genre in the middle of the 19th century but at the end of the century a new movement emerged called the Aesthetic movement. Wilde was influenced by the Aesthetic movement, or in particular by the ideology of Walter Pater. The Aesthetic movement emerged as a challenge to realism which elevated the social and political meaning behind novels. Its adherents believed that art did not have to be burdened by meaning but should instead stand alone in its beauty.

With *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde broke away from the Victorian literary tradition that focused more on realism and character development. In the preface to *Dorian Gray*, Oscar encapsulated the ideas of Aestheticism: “There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all” (Wilde 3). This is quite ironic because the book was condemned as an immoral book when in fact its sole purpose was explicitly and unmistakably moral. It depicts a character who tries to achieve more from life than life has to offer. Also, it shows Dorian’s moral degradation because of the lifestyle he lived. Therefore the moral of the novel is that one cannot live life on those terms.

Wilde was influenced by many styles and themes when he was writing *Dorian Gray*, and he was especially inspired by the Aesthetic movement. Wilde also drew upon themes in his novel such as the Gothic theme, the doppelganger theme and the Faustian bargain. The basis of the novel is the Faustian pact with the devil, and he merges the doppelganger theme with it. The doppelganger theme in *Dorian Gray* was influenced by the time and place in which Wilde lived and worked. The Victorian era was a period during which one of the highest values was public morality. The doppelganger theme is an expression of that sentiment. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* has been viewed as everything from an attack on late-Victorian hypocrisy to a story of “the domination of an older man by a beautiful youth” (Baker 350). All of these interpretations indicate that the novel is multi-layered, and shows that it is not as simplistic as many tend to think when they read it for the first time. This essay will focus on the split identity of Dorian Gray and on how Wilde used the above-mentioned familiar literary themes, but it also discusses how he departs from these to give them a new slant. Within this context, the main focus will be on how Wilde borrows themes from *Faust* and *The Strange Case of*

*Dr. Jekyll and Hyde*. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, he employs the Faustian motif to fuse established Victorian narrative traditions with the central concept of Aestheticism.



## **1. Victorian Realism**

Oscar Wilde lived in Britain during the time known as the Victorian era. This was a period when many social changes and technological improvements were taking place. Britain was developing extremely rapidly during the nineteenth century, new social classes were emerging and it was becoming a more modern society. This was a time in the world when the Industrial Revolution was at its peak, new scientific discoveries were being made and more books were being published than ever before. Realism dominated the literary scene in Britain. Realism was mostly aimed at the growing middle class, and authors primarily came from this same class (Purchase 186). Therefore, realist fiction flourished because of the “very milieu” (185) for it which it was written. Realism, or realist fiction, rose to prominence in the 1850s, as part of a culture that was obsessed with the truths and realities of an increasingly scientific and secular world. Realist fiction succeeded Romanticism in literature, which was more idealistic. However, realism was art which elevated the ordinary, the mundane everyday life and familiar things. It reduced the distance between literature and life, thereby imitating reality. It focused on character above everything else with the development of individual self-consciousness and the idea of an inner self as the main theme. That is the reason for the popularity of the genre because it depicted characters to which the majority of England could relate. “Realist fiction is centrally concerned with the antagonism between individuals and society” (Purchase 186) the same struggle that preoccupied Victorian citizens. These types of developmental stories are usually known by their German name, Bildungsroman, as they tend to focus on characters who are on some sort of journey, either physical or spiritual. They typically end with a conclusion or wrap up unsolved problems. Realist novels are often about characters who move from a bad condition or situation to a happy ending, thereby bringing hope to the middle classes. Realist novels aimed to provide a message or meaning for the reader. Members of the middle classes expected to find moral significance in art and most importantly in literature (Matsuoka 79). It was a common belief in Victorian England that the visual arts were to be used as a way of educating the masses and bringing social classes together (Matsuoka 81). Because the gap between the social classes was increasing, realist novels of the 19th century focused on the moral and psychological growth of protagonists, characters who were on a spiritual journey to try to find themselves. The main characters in this type of novel undergo a process of initiation which leads them to

greater self-awareness and helps them to establish a new personal and social identity. The most famous of these novels includes Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, which follows the progression of Pip's maturity. Another is *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, which focuses on Elizabeth Bennet's prejudice and misconceptions of the world and her move to a more realistic viewpoint (Kohl 161). Even though the popularity of realist fiction was greatest during the 19th century another movement emerged at the end of the era called the Aesthetic movement. Aestheticism emerged in opposition to realism, going against everything that realism represented. Wilde is usually considered to be an Aesthetic writer, although he does include other themes so he cannot be considered purely an Aesthetic author.

## 2. Wilde as an Aesthetic author

It was only after the 1860s that realism was presented with a serious challenge in the emergence of decadent and aesthetic writers (Womack), such as Oscar Wilde who followed the ideology of Walter Pater, one of his professors at Oxford. Pater was influenced by the French movement *l'art pour l'art*. Aestheticism was an ideology that was defined as “the perception or appreciation of beauty” (Purchase 37). According to Gilmour, Aestheticism was “a mixture of straightforward rebellion against Victorianism, new theorising and extravagant posing” (cited by Matsuoka 78). Pater condemned realism’s idea that literature should be useful or authentic, feeling instead that it should not include didactic elements but should stand alone and be beautiful. Aesthetes appreciated and enjoyed beauty in its many forms, a notion which diverged from what members of the middle classes believed: “to find moral significance in art” (Matsouka 79). However, Aestheticism rejected this idea in literature and instead focused on art for art’s sake. Also, followers of Aestheticism argued that art should be free from the burdens of social and political commitment and moral instruction because art need not have a useful purpose. It elevated the pursuit of beauty as the most important aim in life (Matsaouka 79).

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* is usually considered to be an Aesthetic novel because Wilde wrote an ode to the Aesthetic movement in the preface. In the last sentence of the preface he encapsulated the whole idea of the Aesthetic movement: “All art is quite useless” (Wilde 2). Wilde was trying to say that art should not contain any meaning or message, in other words that art should not contain any social or political significance. Also in the preface, Wilde wrote what the role of the Aesthetic artist should be in society: “The artist is the creator of beautiful things. To reveal art and conceal the artist is art’s aim” (Wilde 3). This viewpoint is apparent in the first chapters of the novel. When Basil has finished the portrait of Dorian, he is not pleased with it because he has revealed too much of himself in the picture and therefore has failed as an artist. Or, Basil has failed as an Aesthetic artist because he has put himself into the portrait this is not what Aesthetic artists were supposed to do. *Dorian Gray* is almost a cautionary tale of an artist in that Basil knows what the correct role of the artist is and realises that he has failed in his duty. When he fully understands his failure he vows to never show the picture to the public.

For these reasons, Wilde is often classified as an Aesthetic artist. However, because he does include other themes in *Dorian Gray*, his earlier works such as *The Critic as Artist* and *The Decay of Lying* are considered to be more purely Aesthetic. The Aesthetic movement shaped much of Wilde's writings, but *Dorian Gray* is not as aesthetically informed as these earlier works. Pater was criticised for being too aesthetic and Wilde recognised the flaws of Aestheticism around the time he wrote *Dorian Gray* (Ellmann 297). Robert K. Miller even states that "Wilde is far from being an advocate of art for art's sake" (Matsuoka 97). *Dorian Gray* is a moralistic tale of a man who lives his life merely seeking sensations which contradicts exactly what the aesthetic and decadent movement elevated. Wilde demonstrates that a person cannot live solely on those terms because the only resulting path is death. So while the preface is unambiguously aesthetic, there is no parallel between the preface and the novel itself and Wilde goes against what he himself clearly states in the preface: "There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all" (Wilde 3). In chapter nineteen, Dorian has an argument with Lord Henry about his ideas concerning a book he gave him in an earlier chapter: "[Y]ou poisoned me with a book once. I should not forgive that. Harry, promise me that you will never lend that book to anyone. It does harm" (Wilde 208). Dorian's statement contradicts what the preface states, and then Lord Henry continues along the same vein: "As for being poisoned by a book, there is no such thing as that. Art has no influence upon action. It annihilates the desire to act. It is superbly sterile. The books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world its own shame" (Wilde 208). These contradictions indicate that Wilde himself was outgrowing Aestheticism. In particular, Aestheticism combined with decadence is essentially selfish and Wilde "rejects the notion of egocentrism and the doctrine of art for art's sake by providing didactics the aesthetic movement..." (Matsuoka 91). In fact, Wilde constructed a new Aestheticism in the novel that included both thought and behaviour. He modified the relationship between the reader and the writer which aesthetes wanted to keep completely separate (Ellmann 288). *Dorian Gray* is a negative version of aesthetics, and Wilde exhibits its dangers (Ellmann 297) through the moral degradation of Dorian. He combined Aestheticism with elements of realism and Gothic art thereby connecting it to modernism in literature.

Although Wilde speaks out against Realism in the preface, he does use some of the same features that realist writers used. Following realism's tradition Wilde focuses on the psychological development of Dorian. *Dorian Gray* has a moral, even though

this may not have been Wilde's express intention. He concentrates on the spiritual development of his characters, or more accurately on the loss of Dorian's identity. Norbert Kohl points out that the novel takes place mostly indoors rather than outdoors (Kohl 149), which indicates that Wilde was more concerned with the inner development of his character than his actions. Indoor and outdoor settings are employed to show the moral degradation of his main character. The outdoors is Dorian's refuge which he seeks at crucial moments in the novel. This is apparent after he leaves Sibyl on the night they break up he wanders around the streets of London. Also, after Dorian kills Basil, he steps out on the balcony (Kohl 149). Kohl, amongst others, describes the tradition of the Victorian novel as: "the moral and psychological expansion of protagonists who begin in self-absorption and move, through the course of a tortuous ordeal of education, to more complete self-knowledge" (Kohl 161). When the reader begins to know Dorian he seems at first to be an innocent boy who has no idea what the future holds, and he has an optimistic view of life. Victorian coming of age stories usually depict characters who are on a spiritual journey to develop their identities. This journey allows the characters to "learn, progress and ultimately prevail" (Purchase 169). *Dorian Gray* includes this pattern of lost identity, but it is more of a reversed coming-of-age story. Dorian never triumphs, he never reaches complete maturity. He does, however show some signs of emotional development: for instance, in chapter nineteen when he "describes his vain attempt to break free from his inner isolation and egotism" (Kohl 161), he thinks he can become a better person. However, there is no resolution for Dorian. He never truly reaches the point of complete maturity and when his tragic realisations come to him he stabs the portrait thereby killing himself. As such, *Dorian Gray* can also be seen as a parody of the classic Bildungsroman genre that was so popular amongst realist writers (Kohl 161). Wilde is at the forefront of the modernists who criticized this genre for taking a reactionary and regressive stance (Purchase 233). This shows how far Wilde was ahead of his time. He had one foot in our modern era which is why he is more celebrated now than he was in his own day. *Dorian Gray* was not widely admired by Victorian readers although, modern readers tend to relate much more to the novel. The primary subject of *Dorian Gray* is the philosophical analysis of Aestheticism. Lord Henry is the spokesperson for aesthetes as he speaks against middle class values. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was not popular with the middle classes because it depicted characters who were from the upper classes and had a great deal of money. This was of course not the case for the majority of Victorian society. The novel

was not in sync with the reality of its time, therefore the public could not relate to the characters. In addition, the middle classes still expected to find moral significance in art and the fact is that this work violated the “homely philosophy of life of the middle class” (Kohl 139) and focused more on the new Hedonism. Wilde was a rebel when it came to *Dorian Gray* and bad reviews stemmed from his movement against Victorian ideology. Now we can see that it marks a turning point, typical of the transition from Victorianism to the upcoming modern era (Chevereşan 147). It was not until later in the 20th century that the novel at last grew in popularity.

### 3. Gothic element in *Dorian Gray*

Oscar Wilde was one of many *fin-de-siècle* writers who used modern Gothic themes. Modern Gothicism has its origins in the Romantic period, emerging out from a culture that lived in uncertainty because of two major historical events: the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution (Purchase 79). Gothic fiction represented an escape from the Age of Reason, according to Victorian belief (Snodgrass 8). The Gothic element in literature is hard to define precisely, but it is generally represented by ominous settings and riveting events that make the reader's heart race. Common motifs that appear in Gothic literature, many of which appear in *Dorian Gray*, are: eerie atmospheres, dungeons, the supernatural, monsters, doppelgangers, magic objects, demons, devils, science used for evil ends, etc. (Junger 4). Vintage Gothic settings were ruined abbeys, convents, graveyards or sinister castles. By the late nineteenth century, the Victorian Gothic setting had moved to the bleakest quarters of London. London was characterised by a brooding populace and horror-filled streets of terror (Womack). Dark and ominous locales appear frequently in Gothic literature, as they indeed appear in *Dorian Gray*. The attic in which Dorian keeps his picture is described in language evoking suspense and terror. Wilde also utilizes foreshadowing to prepare the reader for climatic events, setting the tone via gruesome descriptions. The language of the episode in which Dorian brings Basil to the chamber where he keeps his portrait indicates that nothing good can possibly happen in this horrible room.

The room looked as if it had not been lived in for years. A faded Flemish tapestry, a curtained picture, an old Italian *cassone*, and almost empty bookcase - that was all that it seemed to contain besides a chair and table. As Dorian Gray was lighting a half-burned candle that was standing on the mantel-shelf, he saw that the, he saw that the whole was covered with dust, and the carpet was in holes. A mouse ran shuffling behind the wainscoting. There was a damp odour of mildew (Wilde 148).

Wilde utilises this particular setting to prepare the reader for coming events. This also harkens back to a foreshadowing at the beginning of the novel when Basil is unhappy with the painting of Dorian and tries to stab it. Dorian prevents him from destroying the portrait because "It would be murder!". (Wilde 29). Dorian is as yet unaware of the painting's supernatural power because the first change in the portrait does not appear until Dorian rejects Sibyl. However the reader can see that it foreshadows what happens at the end of the book when Dorian stabs the painting of himself and dies immediately.

Secrecy is also an element that often appears in Gothic novels. In Victorian Gothic, secrecy, due to the strict social rules of the Victorian era, is a dominant theme portrayed on multiple levels. Dorian must constantly hide his secrets because he is afraid of society's reaction. In fact, he keeps many secrets about his true identity, the most important of which he keeps under lock and key in the chamber. Locking something away, often a monster, appears in many famous Gothic novels such as *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley and *Jekyll and Hyde*.

Wilde relied heavily on the supernatural and the grotesque to show Dorian's spiritual side. In fact, the entire novel contains a supernatural dimension as the central image is a Gothic one (Oates 424). Wilde uses this element throughout the novel but focuses more on the psychological development of Dorian. Dorian is a "subset of the Gothic psychological fiction in which characters gaze inward at warring dichotomies" (Snodgrass 83). Dorian gazes inward, but in his case through the portrait where the supernatural power lies. According to Joyce Carol Oates: "The supernatural element, however, is never active except in terms of the portrait", because the portrait is "given the secular nature of Dorian's personality" (Oates, "The Picture Of Dorian Gray": Wilde's Parable Of The Fall" 424). The twisted inner being of Dorian is revealed at the end of the novel. After Dorian stabs his alter ego in the form of the portrait, his corpse transforms into a withered old man. In Gothic novels there is usually an evil character or someone with diabolical powers. This evil character is here represented by Lord Henry who poisons Dorian's mind with hedonistic ideas. Dorian first appears as an innocent but is corrupted by the devilish intentions of Lord Henry. Additionally, the "diabolical powers are stirred by Basil's art, but Basil himself has no awareness of it" (424). With each sin that Dorian commits the picture takes on a new and uglier form.

The Gothic was "A genre distinguished by its supernaturalist content, its fascination with social transgression, and its departure in formal terms, from the emerging norm of realism" (Hogle 190). Gothic is the opposition to orderliness and predictability that defined Victorian novels. Gothic literature often focuses on the human condition as an ambitious mixture of good and evil powers that cannot be completely understood by human reason (Textual characteristics of the gothic). Although *Dorian Gray* is a Gothic story at heart, Wilde still manages to convey his aesthetic ideas. And similarly to the aesthetic movement, the Gothic was used as an opposition to realism in literature. Wilde wrote "against the background of Walter Pater's aesthetic writings, but also against Pater in a stronger sense" (Riquelme 490). He



merges the two different literary devices together. The novel does start with an ode to the aesthetic movement, but as the story progresses Gothic elements appear. “Wilde responds to Pater by projecting the dark implications of Pater’s attitudes and formulations in a mythic Gothic narrative of destruction and self-destruction” (Riquelme 491). Wilde aestheticises the Gothic as a way of creating a new version of Pater’s ideas. The aesthetic and the Gothic elements are completely different from one another but the fusion is possible because “of the tendency of Gothic writing to present a fantastic world of indulgence and boundary-crossing and the tendency of the aesthetic, in Pater, to press beyond conventional boundaries and to recognize terror within beauty” (Riquelme 491). Precisely because *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is not, in a strict sense, a Gothic story, Wilde does not delve as deeply into the Gothic themes as other Gothic stories from that time. For example, it is not as dark as *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson even though Wilde utilizes similar Gothic elements of the doppelganger. However, Wilde’s portrayal differs from the classical form of the doppelganger.

### **3.1. The doppelganger in *Dorian Gray***

Duality, or leading a double life, is one of the motifs of the Gothic genre that appears with frequency. Indeed, duality in *Dorian Gray* is represented in the doppelganger theme. It is “a consequence of the scientific belief that there is a certain inner duality in every human” (Junger 8). The term doppelganger derives from Germany and is popular amongst Romantic writers, but the doppelganger motif truly flourished in the Gothic novel. According to Snodgrass, a doppelganger is: “A mirroring or duality of a character’s persona, the concept of a doppelganger refers to the twin, shadow double, demon double, and split personality” (Snodgrass 83). The doppelganger theme appears in the picture of *Dorian Gray* but not in a classic form. The idea of the doppelganger in *Dorian Gray* is represented in Dorian’s personality which is “split into two parts which act and react independently; the one is physical, the other spiritual, and the link is the changing portrait” (Kohl 150). The doppelganger theme was popular among 19th century writers, having emerged as part of a culture that focused on how individuals looked in the public eye and how people presented themselves in society. Both middle class Victorian society and the aristocracy were so concerned with respectability that virtually no one could be himself in public. Therefore, many people were forced to hide their true selves because they were afraid of how society would react towards them.

### 3.2. Inspiration for the doppelganger

The doppelganger theme was probably inspired by Wilde's own double life, due both to his personality and the social conditions in which he lived and worked. *Dorian Gray* is not the only work by Wilde that dealt with having a double life. *The Importance of Being Earnest* also portrays a man who leads a double life but in this case for a comedic end. In *Dorian Gray* Wilde was not afraid to use homosexual overtones which was a risky gamble given the strictures of the age. Victorian society was extremely rigid about homosexuality to the point that it was even prohibited by law in, the Libel Act of 1843. Wilde did briefly attempt to adopt a life of Victorian respectability by concealing his homosexuality, posing as a husband by marrying Constance Lloyd in 1884 and having children but he continued to engage in homosexual behaviour behind closed doors. Therefore, the doppelganger motif in *Dorian Gray* can be seen as Wilde's confession to relieve his guilty conscience about, leading a double life. Around the same time that the novel was published, he began his famous relationship with Lord Douglas, which ultimately led to his downfall. There are similarities between the relationship of Wilde with Lord Douglas and that of Basil with Dorian. Basil is obsessed with Dorian to the point that when he tries to save his soul Dorian ends up killing Basil. Because the novel contains homosexual insinuations it was used in the trials of Oscar Wilde to prove that he was breaking the law. Wilde was famously convicted for having had a relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas and sentenced to jail. After his imprisonment he fled to France where he died couple of years later. *Dorian Gray* is Wilde's autobiographical confession of "a man uncertain of his own beliefs and morally torn between conscience and temptation" (Matsuoka 97). The plot is constructed of diverse ideas which indicate that Wilde was not sure of who he was as an artist. The tragedy of Wilde is the result of prejudice in society (Matsouka 92). Wilde relates his personal experiences of being gay in a world that did not accept homosexuality. Therefore, *Dorian Gray* can be understood as an autobiographical novel about a man who lived in a time of insecurity. Wilde uses the doppelganger motif to demonstrate that there is a part of himself that must be kept hidden. Much like Dorian, Wilde masqueraded as a respectable Victorian but was a deviant underneath based on the standards of the day.

#### **4. A comparison of the Doppelganger motif in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray***

*Dorian Gray* has been linked to many works of literature because it deals with similar themes and subjects that other writers from Wilde's time also advanced. One of the great works to which *Dorian Gray* has been compared is *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* precisely because both deal with a similar theme, that of the doppelganger. It has been suggested that *Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde* was one of the novels that directly inspired Wilde. It was written a few years before the publication of *Dorian Gray* and in both the doppelganger motif depicting a double who is both the duplicate and the antithesis of the original is evident (Snodgrass 84). Hyde is described as a small, and ugly creature who causes the people around London fear him because of his wickedness. Jekyll's double is given the appropriate name of Hyde because he must be kept hidden given his malice and also because Jekyll is an upstanding and respectable man whose reputation must not be tarnished (Oates, "Jekyll/Hyde" 603). Due to Hyde's wickedness and deformed physique, Jekyll is forced to keep Hyde as a secret from London society. The doppelganger motif is used to exemplify the fact that these characters have dual natures that act independently even though the core theme of *Jekyll and Hyde* is the doppelganger, while that of *Dorian Gray* is the quest for immortality accompanied by a discussion on the relationship between art and life, beauty and vice (Punter 9).

In both *Dorian Gray* and *Jekyll and Hyde* the duality focuses on the idea of good versus evil within the human psyche. Stevenson expresses this idea in the last section of the novella when Jekyll says that "man is not only one but truly two" (Stevenson 69), or more importantly, that the soul has two spheres, - the good and the bad - which are in constant conflict with each other. This corresponds to Dorian's cry "Each of us have Heaven and Hell in him, Basil" (Wilde 150). The good versions of the characters are in the public eye but the evil versions break away from the social norms which is why they are kept hidden. The virtuous is the mask that conceals the true inner self that is not what society would expect from the person. This is true for Jekyll and Hyde because: "Hyde is the consequence of a scientific experiment and shameless indulgence of appetites that cannot be assimilated into the propriety of everyday life" (Oates, "Jekyll/Hyde" 604). In the public eye Jekyll is a respectable figure and Dorian the picture of perfection. Dorian is a beautiful man who never ages to the point that everyone envies his beauty. Jekyll's alter ego, Hyde, can satisfy his loathsome desires in

dark alleys and private quarters far from London's respectable areas. Jekyll likes to act out his deepest desires when he is Hyde, all the while being acclaimed for his success as a doctor and honourable member of society. However, both characters have an evil inside of them that is an integral part of their beings. The doppelganger motif is used to express the fact that these characters' natures and second selves act independently. In *Dorian Gray* Dorian sells his soul for eternal beauty by separating his body from his soul. Therefore, the two aspects of his being work independently instead of harmoniously, his "soul and body become increasingly disconnected and finally separated entirely, as symbolized in the increasing disjunction between the unaging beauty of Dorian's body and the hideous representation of his soul (that is the picture)" (Matsuoka 98). "In the hidden selves of both Hyde and Gray, the secret sin devours them like a cancer, consuming the humanity of Jekyll and the serenity of Gray" (Snodgrass 311). Wilde uses a variation of the doppelganger theme instead of having an actual double like Jekyll, whose personality is split into two parts which act autonomously. One side of Dorian is spiritual and the other is physical. After Dorian kills himself his corpse turns into the old and grotesque version that was once the portrait: "The unification can only come about through death represents a deeply pessimistic view of the problem of human identity (Kohl 153).

Wilde also included this idea of the imperfection of humanity in *Dorian Gray* by having the character forced to hide his alter ego in a secret chamber. Stevenson and Wilde both dealt with the related subject of characters trying to find their way in a world that is excessively focused on perfection. Both Wilde and Stevenson used the doppelganger theme to express what was happening around them. The Victorian identity at the end of the era was in crisis because there was a "conflict between the Victorians' severe need to satisfy their natural desires. Hypocrisy was rife" (Kohl 174). Their doppelgangers are a way to blame their ugly behaviour on someone else because their respectable public images cannot be ruined. This theme is used in both works as a judgment against Victorian society. Jekyll has to keep Hyde hidden because of his wickedness but also because Jekyll is an exemplary man (Oates, "Jekyll/Hyde" 604). He is a model of the perfect Victorian citizen who is a hardworking physician greatly respected in society, whereas his doppelganger has a bad nature and ugly form, everything that society loathes. However, when Jekyll realises what effect his alter ego has on the people around him, he attempts to gain control over it by destroying Hyde. Tragically, in order to do so he also has to destroy himself. Similarly in *Dorian Gray*,

Dorian tries to save his soul in the Hetty Merton episode. This is ultimately a vain attempt by Dorian. His soul has become too corrupted to improve. He manages to appear to others as a man who has changed but deep down he is still the same ugly version of the painting. When he realises that there is no turning back he tries to destroy the thing that he loathes most about himself and ends up killing himself.

“Had the Victorian ideal been less hypocritically ideal or had Dr. Jekyll been content with a less perfect public reputation, his tragedy would not have occurred” (Oates, “Jekyll/Hyde” 604). Therefore, Hyde would not have existed were it not for the pressure by society to be something unnatural. Similarities between the novels lie in the fact that neither could not show his true self to the public. *Dorian Gray* expresses this Victorian crisis when Basil states: “we in our own madness have separated the two [body and soul] and have invented a realism that is vulgar, and an ideality that is void” (Wilde 13). Here Wilde focuses on the word “madness”. The madness is how people in society try to separate something that is part of themselves, to become the ideal person that society expects (Oates, “Jekyll/Hyde” 604). However, this is not completely true for Jekyll because Hyde is a part of him. When he tries to destroy the evil that is Hyde, he fails and transforms into the evil version.

## 5. The Faustian hero as he appears in *Dorian Gray*

Wilde merges the doppelganger theme with the deal with the devil. “The underlying legend, of trying to elicit more from life than life can give” (Ellmann 297), is the basis of *Dorian Gray*. This legend of making a pact with the devil has appeared in countless renderings, notably as Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*, Mann’s *Doktor Faustus* and Goethe’s *Faust*. “Faust also called Faustus, or Doctor Faustus, the hero of one of the most durable legends in Western folklore and literature, the story of a German necromancer or astrologer who sells his soul to the devil in exchange for knowledge and power” (Faust). The Faust legend depicts a character who strives for the unattainable but is held back because of human limitations. This is an old theme in literary history and Oscar Wilde was neither the first nor the last artist to tackle the subject. Wilde is known to have stated “in every first novel the hero is the author as Christ or Faust” (Brandreth 37). Many critics have speculated as to the source of Wilde’s inspiration. Ellmann and other critics suggest that Wilde was influenced by *Faust* by Johan Wolfgang Goethe (Ellmann 293). There are many similarities between the two works, especially the characters and plot.

Dorian and Faust are both extremely egocentric characters willing to do whatever it takes to go beyond what their human limitations allow. Dorian is prepared to sacrifice his soul to preserve his youthful beauty, while Faust wants to gain experience and knowledge (Kohl 162). They are both dissatisfied with what they have and want to achieve something greater. Dorian’s “Faustian pact with the devil is dramatized, but the devil himself is absent” (Oates, “The Picture of Dorian Gray”: Wilde’s Parable of the Fall” 424). However, the great difference is that Dorian does not actually sell his soul to the devil, he makes instead what he thinks is a harmless wish when he cries: “If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that-For that- I would give everything!” (Wilde 28). After Dorian has uttered these words his soul and body separate. The soul moves to the portrait which thenceforth shows his moral degradation. Dorian and the reader are not aware of this supernatural event until after Sibyl Vane kills herself. However, the physical part of Dorian remains the same while the picture grows uglier. The pact that Faust makes with Mephistopheles is an actual pact. Dorian represents Faust in the story, but Dorian starts out as an innocent young man who has his whole life ahead of him, content with his situation until Lord Henry poisons his mind with hedonistic ideas. This is a turning point in the novel because it is Lord Henry’s ideas that send Dorian on his journey of

development. Faust and Dorian both go on journeys, but Faust goes on a physical journey whereas Dorian goes on a spiritual journey.

Both *Faust* and *Dorian Gray* are constructed in two parts. At the beginning of *Faust* “Part I sets out the magician Faust’s despair, his pact with Mephistopheles, and his love for Gretchen” (Faust). Similarly, in *Dorian Gray*, the first part deals with Dorian meeting Lord Henry and his wish of retaining his eternal beauty. Also, part one follows the relationship between Dorian and Sibyl and her subsequent death. “Part II covers Faust’s life at court, the wooing and winning of Helen of Troy, and his purification and salvation” (Faust). Equivalently, after Sibyl’s death there is a long chapter detailing Dorian’s indulgence in a hedonistic lifestyle. Both works end with the character’s salvation. Furthermore, *Faust* and *Dorian Gray* deal with love that culminates in horrible tragedy: the suicides of Sibyl Vane and Gretchen. Faust courts Gretchen and Dorian courts Sibyl, both Sibyl and Gretchen fall madly in love with the beauty of the protagonists. Faust and Dorian reject their love, they are driven to madness and end up killing themselves. There are also similarities between Sibyl’s brother (James) and Gretchen’s brother (Valentin) as they both end up being killed.

“The Faust legend provided Gothic fiction with a durable vision of the mad scientist doomed by egomania and diabolism” (Snodgrass 94). *Dorian Gray* is essentially about the desire of wanting to stay young and beautiful, but it appears that Wilde has borrowed the idea from Goethe. There are also dual nature themes within both works. The duality within *Dorian Gray* and *Faust* becomes unmistakable in the battle between good and evil in which evil is portrayed by both Mephistopheles and Lord Henry. The Gothic dualism is also evident in *Faust* as it deals with good versus evil within the human psyche. The divided self of Dorian corresponds to Faust’s cry (Kohl 162):

Two souls, alas, exist in my breast,  
One separated from another:  
One, with its crude love of life, just  
Clings to the world, tenaciously, grips tight,  
The other soars powerfully above the dust,  
Into the far ancestral height (Kline)

Both *Faust* and *Dorian Gray* suggest that in every human there is an inner battle between good and evil. Humans have the option to act upon either one. The evil is represented in Lord Henry who corresponds to the evil Mephistopheles. Basil Hallward

represents the good character. He knows what Lord Henry is capable of doing to the innocent Dorian and tries to prevent it. In the first chapter of *Dorian Gray* Basil attempts to talk some sense into Lord Henry: "He has a simple and a beautiful nature. Your aunt was quite right in what she said of him. Don't spoil him. Don't try to influence him" (Wilde 16). After Lord Henry's first meeting with Dorian the battle of good versus evil begins immediately with Basil. Basil tries to stop Lord Henry from influencing Dorian as Basil considers Dorian a dear friend and an unspoiled young man who has a naive outlook on life. However, Lord Henry conquers Dorian and therefore evil wins the battle and triumphs. Similarly, in *Faust* Mephistopheles is the devilish character who vanquishes the good. The relationship between Mephistopheles and Faust resembles the relationship between Lord Henry and Dorian. Lord Henry's function as Mephistopheles is very clear throughout the novel. Lord Henry encourages Dorian to seek a more hedonistic life based on beauty and self-fulfilment. Dorian is inspired by Lord Henry's advice on how he should live his life. Lord Henry has this power over Dorian because when Dorian experiences self-doubt he looks to him for guidance. Lord Henry then provides advice and wins him over. His influence on Dorian "becomes particularly clear when instead of taking his friend's scruples seriously, he is all the more insistent on stylising Sibyl's death" (Kohl 152). Lord Henry's power over Dorian is not a good influence. Dorian's self-knowledge is poisoned by Lord Henry and therefore he becomes corrupted by hedonistic ideas which end up negatively shaping his future. Mephistopheles has the same effect upon Faust. Mephistopheles and Lord Henry are the malign characters who focus more on their own ideologies than on Faust's and Dorian's well-being. However, unlike Dorian and Lord Henry, Basil Hallward functions as a force for good. He plays the same role as the Lord and three angels in *Faust*. The Lord, the three angels and Basil all believe that Faust and Dorian will turn away from sin and become good. Sadly, it has become too late for them to change course and embark upon a good life in the last sections of the works.

Elements of *Faust* undeniably appear in *Dorian Gray*. Wilde constructed a new perspective of the legend in which the famous theme is "reduced to the simple polarity of aesthetic and hedonistic pleasure versus morality" (Kohl 162). Both works focus on the tragedy of the fall from grace of two men who go above and beyond to reach the unattainable. This fall is represented in *Faust* as the decline of a scholar who thinks that he can have it all. For Dorian it is the loss of innocence symbolised by Dorian's infatuation with himself. A fall from grace can only happen if the characters have



“attained degree of economic and intellectual freedom” (Oates, “The Picture of Dorian Gray”: Wilde’s Parable of the Fall” 424). Faust has mastered philosophy, medicine and theology and Dorian has inherited money from his grandfather. Therefore their falls from grace are possible because Faust has gained a degree of intellectual freedom and Dorian has economic freedom. The main theme in both parts of *Faust* is his dissatisfaction with the limits of man’s potential. This is the driving force throughout the play. Wilde uses same the theme in *Dorian Gray*, but a variation of the age-old theme of making a pact with the devil.

The Faustian bargain has provided several authors in literary history with inspiration. Wilde borrows this common theme, however there are many elements in *Dorian Gray* that make the novel essentially different from a classic Faust story. The theme of selling one’s soul for something un-earthly is given a new twist. The Faustian element is only apparent in the physical being of Dorian who is influenced by a devil that leads him to self-destruction. The spiritual part of Dorian, the picture, does not contain this element. Instead the picture is used to show the consequences of sacrificing one’s soul for a life of mere pleasure. Wilde uses this legendary theme of selling one’s soul to the devil as a way to split the novel into different thematic sections. Therefore, there is a dualism within the novel that is represented by the picture. On the one hand, Dorian is beautiful which symbolises the way the Aesthetic movement looked at life and art. On the other hand, the picture grows more grotesque with Dorian’s every sin so the picture represents the Gothic element and also the psychological degradation of his soul. Within the novel, Wilde also uses a variation of the famous doppelganger theme. Unlike *Jekyll and Hyde* there is not an actual doppelganger, but the theme is used to portray different aspects of literary devices. Additionally, the portrayal of the ruin of Dorian’s soul can be interpreted as a didactic tale showing that one cannot live life only by seeking pleasure. Wilde also incorporates some elements of realism although without including a happy ending for the protagonist. Realism tended to focus on positive self-development stories in which the characters moved from bad to good conditions. Wilde’s take on realism has the protagonist go the opposite way, from good to bad conditions. Finally, the Faustian motif is used as a way to dramatize previously established Victorian narrative themes. Wilde ingeniously employed these themes to create a work that portrays different perspectives.

## Conclusion

On the whole, the time and place in which Wilde worked was unsuitable for an artist like Wilde. The society in which he lived was very strict on many levels and he was not allowed to be himself, a gay man. He was therefore criticized for the immoral nature of *Dorian Gray*. Realism dominated the literary scene from the middle of the nineteenth century and Realist novels usually imitated reality by focusing on the ordinary life of the characters. In addition, Realism examined the development of the individual self-consciousness of the characters. These types of stories are usually known as coming of age stories and they tended to have happy endings for the protagonists. However, Wilde, among others, emerged with a new movement called the Aesthetic movement which was born at the end of the Victorian era. Aestheticism was in opposition to realism in that it elevated beauty in art above all else. Wilde was generally considered an Aesthetic writer throughout most of his career. However, Wilde wrote a novel about the dangers of the Aesthetic movement. Also, he used the famous theme of selling one's soul to the devil as a way to split the novel into different thematic layers. On one hand, Dorian is beautiful to exemplify the way the aesthetic movement looked at life and art. On the other hand, the picture grows more grotesque with Dorian's every sin. The picture represents the Gothic element and also the psychological degradation of his soul. Even though *Dorian Gray* was generally considered an immoral story it does contain a moral. The moral and the didactic element of *Dorian Gray* are that a life of mere pleasure-seeking only leads to ruin. Showing the moral degradation in the painting of Dorian informs the reader that one cannot live on those terms. Therefore, Wilde does use elements of Realism in *Dorian Gray* even though it is ultimately a reverse coming of age story because it does not include a happy ending for the protagonist. Within this context, Wilde used all of these themes together to construct a more modern vision and masterpiece.

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