REALISM

Great economic and political changes started in the beginning of the 19th century. Trading class began to struggle for radical political changes. As the political power was placed in the hands of the property – owning class, labor became cheep and living conditions grew worse. Disappointed and haggard working class decided to fight for their rights. People held uprisings, strikes, mass meetings and demanded more democratic reforms to improve their own conditions. All this stimulated the growth of realism and in the presentation of reality Romanticism became too abstract and symbolic. The realistic novels became the most important and most popular genre (7).

Realism in literature is an approach that attempts to describe life without idealization or romantic subjectivity. Although realism is not limited to any one century or group of writers, it is most often associated with the literary movement in 19th-century France, specifically with the French novelists Flaubert and Balzac. George Eliot introduced realism into England, and William Dean Howells introduced it into the United States. Realism has been chiefly concerned with the commonplaces of everyday life among the middle and lower classes, where character is a product of social factors and environment is the integral element in the dramatic complications (13). In the drama, realism is most closely associated with Ibsen's social plays. Later writers felt that realism laid too much emphasis on external reality. Many, notably Henry James, turned to a psychological realism that closely examined the complex workings of the mind (12).

The great realists of England devoted to the fight against various social evils. They posed the problems of poverty, crime, child labor, the system of education, the fate of youngster, the positions of women, artists and many others describing the helplessness of the common man and extremely bad working and living conditions. Manners, social and historical novels became most popular. The attitudes towards the social situation in the 19th century in the novels of various writers ranged from tragically satirical to humorously melodramatic. The greatest English realists were Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, Charlotte Brontë, Oscar Wild and many others.

THE PICTURE OF OSCAR WILDE: A BRIEF LIFE
(1854-1900)

Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde was born on October 16, 1854 in Dublin, Irelandand grew up there. He was the son of a surgeon, Sir William Wilde and the writer Jane Francesca Elgee (known as "Speranza"). Oscar Wilde was born into a most stimulating environment. Speranza held a weekly Salon, which attracted the best and brightest of Dublin's artists, writers, scientists, and miscellaneous intellectuals (11). The Wildes tried to preserve their children from the rest of the middle class, and Wilde observed that he "grew up surrounded by this poverty, but he was protected from its harsh realities as he played in the garden of Merrion Square." (1). Unfortunately, life was very harsh and William Wilde (Oscar's father) fell from grace as one of Dublin's most prominent men, financially and socially ruined by scandal, illness, and mental breakdown.

All the time Oscar was mostly influenced by his mother, who was artificial and unbalanced lady. As she was disappointed at not having a daughter, she dressed her son up as a girl for many years. This situation influenced Oscar Wild and must have done him a lot of harm in his later life.

At school Oscar was known as an excellent story teller. He was very gentle boy and disliked playing boy games like kicking others and cashing. As he was very talented in story telling, translating ancient writers in oral and learning languages, he soon got acquainted classical and modern English literature.

Wilde won a spot at Trinity College Dublin in 1871 and he also won all sorts of prizes for his scholarship – most significantly the coveted Berkely Gold Medal, which he pawned several times in later life to support himself (11). At Oxford University Wilde also distinguished himself as a very talented creator and won a prize for poetry ***Ravenna.*** His great enthusiasm was for the teachings of Walter Pater, who was known as ideologist of the Aesthetic Movement. Soon Wilde started popularizing Pater;s theory of "art for arts sake" and became the leader of the movement. At Oxford, Wilde was also introduced to the joys of combining Mahaffey's Greek ideal with homosexuality-the University's young men. Wilde later wrote of the pleasures of strolling through the grounds observing his pleasant peers. Of course in later life this harmful and unconventional practice ruined him.

In 1882 Oscar Wild made a tour in the United States of America lecturing on the Aesthetic Movement in England. It was a great success. He returned to England with the reputation of the most brilliant wit of his times. (7).

Six years later his famous tales such as "the happy Prince and other tales" and "the house of Pomegranates" appeared in the public. A great conversationalist and a famous wit, Wilde began by publishing mediocre poetry but soon achieved widespread fame for his comic plays. The first, *Vera; or, The Nihilists,* was published in 1880. Wilde followed this work with *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), *An Ideal Husband* (1895), and his most famous play, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). Although these plays relied upon relatively simple and familiar plots, they rose well above convention with their brilliant dialogue and biting satire (7).

His writings were original and expressed ideas of generation. Oscar Wilde became famous home and abroad. But his witty was not acceptable in English high society. Wilde demonstrated his disregard for the laws of morality in some of his poems and his speeches.

Wilde published his only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* before he reached the height of his fame. The first edition appeared in the summer of 1890 in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine.* It was criticized as scandalous and immoral. Disappointed with its reception, Wilde revised the novel in 1891, adding a preface and six new chapters. The Preface (as Wilde calls it) anticipates some of the criti-cism that might be leveled at the novel and answers critics who charge *The Picture of Dorian Gray* with being an immoral tale. It also succinctly sets forth the tenets of Wilde's philosophy of art. Devoted to a school of thought and a mode of sensibility known as aestheticism, Wilde believed that art possesses an intrinsic value—that it is beautiful and therefore has worth, and thus needs serve no other purpose, be it moral or political. This attitude was revolutionary in Victorian England, where popular belief held that art was not only a function of morality but also a means of enforcing it. In the Preface, Wilde also cautioned readers against finding meanings "beneath the surface" of art. Part gothic novel, part comedy of manners, part treatise on the relationship between art and morality, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* continues to present its readers with a puzzle to sort out. There is as likely to be as much disagreement over its meaning now as there was among its Victorian audience, but, as Wilde notes near the end of the Preface, "Diversity of opinion about a work of art shows that the work is new, complex, and vital." (12).

In 1891, the same year that the second edition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was published, Wilde began a homosexual relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas, an aspiring but rather untalented poet. The affair caused a good deal of scandal, and Douglas's father, the marquess of Queensberry, eventually criticized it publicly. When Wilde sued the marquess for libel, he himself was convicted under English sodomy laws for acts of "gross indecency." In 1895, Wilde was sentenced to two years of hard labor, during which time he wrote a long, heartbreaking letter to Lord Alfred titled *De Profundis* (Latin for "Out of the Depths"). After his release, Wilde left England and divided his time between France and Italy, living in poverty. He never published under his own name again, but, in 1898, he did publish under a pseudonym *The Ballad of Reading Gaol,* a lengthy poem about a prisoner's feelings toward another prisoner about to be executed (5).

After that Oscar Wilde dreamed to begin a new life, but the moral damage of imprisonment was too big and the burden of shame too heavy. He spent the rest of his life in Paris under the pseudonym of Sebastian Melmoth. Wilde died in Paris on November 30, 1900, having converted to Roman Catholicism on his deathbed.

Oscar Wilde was a prolific talent who ignored the boundaries in his art and his life. As a writer, he mastered many disparate forms: poems, essays, novels, plays and children's stories among them. His best-known work, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, cemented his reputation as the most colorful force in the drab gray of Victorian England. But the nonconformity he expressed in his works and his appearance--he was famously flamboyant--would soon bring the Irish-born writer to despair. From his days at Oxford to the revelation and trial that led to his incarceration in the Reading Jail, BIOGRAPHY® traces the life of the legendary writer and wit (13).

THE ANALYSIS OF THE NOVEL BY OSCAR WILDE

"THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY"

Key Facts about the novel:

FULL TITLE: "*The Picture of Dorian Gray"*
TYPE OF WORK: Novel
GENRE: Gothic; philosophical; comedy of manners
LANGUAGE: English
TIME AND PLACE WRITTEN: 1890, London
DATE OF FIRST PUBLICATION: The first edition of the novel was published in 1890 in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine.* A second edition, complete with six additional chapters, was published the following year.
PUBLISHER: The 1891 edition was published by Ward, Lock & Company.
NARRATOR: The narrator is anonymous.
POINT OF VIEW: The point of view is third person, omniscient. The narrator chronicles both the objective or external world and the subjective or internal thoughts and feelings of the characters. There is one short paragraph where a first-person point of view becomes apparent; in this section, Wilde becomes the narrator.
TONE: Gothic (dark, supernatural); sardonic; comedic
SETTING (TIME): 1890s
SETTING (PLACE): London, England

PROTAGONIST: Dorian Gray
MAJOR CONFLICT: Dorian Gray, having promised his soul in order to live a life of perpetual youth, must try to reconcile himself to the bodily decay and dissipation that are recorded in his portrait.
RISING ACTION: Dorian notices the change in his portrait after ending his affair with Sibyl Vane; he commits himself wholly to the "yellow book" and indulges his fancy without regard for his reputation; the discrepancy between his outer purity and his inner depravity surges.
CLIMAX: Dorian kills Basil Hallward.
FALLING ACTION: Dorian descends into London's opium dens; he attempts to express remorse to Lord Henry; he stabs his portrait, thereby killing himself.
THEMES: The purpose of art; the supremacy of youth and beauty; the surface nature of society; the negative consequences of influence.
MOTIFS: The color white; the picture of Dorian Gray; homoerotic male relationships.
SYMBOLS: The opium den; James Vane; the yellow book.
FORESHADOWING: Mrs. Vane's failed marriage, as well as Sibyl's portrayal of Juliet from Shakespeare's tragedy *Romeo and Juliet,* foreshadows the doomed nature of Sibyl's relationship with Dorian Gray (13).

Plot Overview:

The novel begins in the elegantly appointed London home of, a well-known artist. Basil discusses his latest portrait with his friend, the clever and scandalously amoral. Lord Henry admires the painting, the subject of which is a gorgeous, golden-haired young man. Believing it to be Basil's finest work, he insists that the painter exhibit it. Basil, however, refuses, claiming that he cannot show the work in public because he has put too much of himself into it. Before the end of their first conversation, Lord Henry upsets Dorian with a speech about the transient nature of beauty and youth. Worried that these, his most impressive characteristics, are fading day by day, Dorian curses his portrait, which he believes will one day remind him of the beauty he will have lost. In a fit of distress, he pledges his soul if only the painting could bear the burden of age and infamy, allowing him to stay forever young. In an attempt to appease Dorian, Basil gives him the portrait.

Over the next few weeks, Lord Henry's influence over Dorian grows stronger. The youth becomes a disciple of the "new Hedonism" and proposes to live a life dedicated to the pursuit of pleasure. He falls in love with a young actress who performs in a theater in London's slums. He adores her acting; she, in turn, refers to him as "Prince Charming" and refuses to heed the warnings of her brother, that Dorian is no good for her. Overcome by her emotions for Dorian, Sibyl decides that she can no longer act, wondering how she can pretend to love on the stage now that she has experienced the real thing. Dorian, who loves Sibyl *because* of her ability to act, cruelly breaks his engagement with her. After doing so, he returns home to notice that his face in Basil's portrait of him has changed: it now sneers. Frightened that his wish for his likeness in the painting to bear the ill effects of his behavior has come true and that his sins will be recorded on the canvas, he resolves to make amends with Sibyl the next day. The following afternoon, however, Lord Henry brings news that Sibyl has killed herself. At Lord Henry's urging, Dorian decides to consider her death a sort of artistic triumph—she personified tragedy—and to put the matter behind him. Meanwhile, Dorian hides his portrait in a remote upper room of his house, where no one other than he can watch its transformation.

Lord Henry gives Dorian a book that describes the wicked exploits of a nineteenth-century Frenchman; it becomes Dorian's bible as he sinks ever deeper into a life of sin and

corruption. He lives a life devoted to garnering new experiences and sensations with no regard for conventional standards of morality or the consequences of his actions. Eighteen years pass. Dorian's reputation suffers in circles of polite London where rumors spread regarding his scandalous exploits. His peers nevertheless continue to accept him because he remains young and beautiful. The figure in the painting, however, grows increasingly wizened and hideous. One night Basil Hallward arrives at Dorian's home to confront him about the rumors that plague his reputation. The two argue, and Dorian eventually offers Basil a look at his (Dorian's) soul. He shows Basil the now-hideous portrait, and Hallward, horrified, begs him to repent. Dorian claims it is too late for penance and kills Basil.

In order to dispose of the body, blackmails his friend, a doctor. The night after the murder, Dorian makes his way to an, who attempts to avenge Sibyl's death. Dorian escapes to his country estate. Unfortunately he notices James Vane peering in through a window, and he becomes wracked by fear and guilt. During the hunting party Dorian kills Vane and feels safe again. He resolves to amend his life but cannot muster the courage to confess his crimes, and the painting now reveals his supposed desire to repent for what it is—hypocrisy. In a fury, Dorian picks up the knife he used to stab Basil Hallward and attempts to destroy the painting. There is a crash, and his servants enter to find the portrait, unharmed, showing Dorian Gray as a beautiful young man. On the floor lies the body of their master—an old man, horribly wrinkled and disfigured, with a knife plunged into his heart.

Analysis:

The Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a collection of epigrams that aptly sums up the philosophical tenets of the artistic and philosophical movement known as aestheticism. Aestheticism, which found its footing in Europe in the early nineteenth century, proposed that art need not serve moral, political, or otherwise didactic ends. Whereas the romantic movement of the early and mid-nineteenth century viewed art as a product of the human creative impulse that could be used to learn more about humankind and the world, the aesthetic movement denied that art must necessarily be an instructive force in order to be valuable. Instead, the aestheticists believed, art should be valuable in and of itself—*art for art's sake.* Near the end of the nineteenth century, Walter Pater, an English essayist and critic, suggested that life itself should be lived in the spirit of art. His views, especially those presented in a collection of essays called *The Renaissance,* had a profound impact on the English poets of the 1890s, most notably Oscar Wilde.

Aestheticism flourished partly as a reaction against the materialism of the burgeoning middle class, assumed to be composed of philistines (individuals ignorant of art) who responded to art in a generally unrefined manner. In this way, the artist could assert him or herself as a remarkable being, one leading the search for beauty in an age marked by shameful class inequality, social hypocrisy, and complacency. No one latched onto this attitude more boldly, or with more flair, than Oscar Wilde. His determination to live a life of beauty and to mold his life into a work of art is reflected in the beliefs and actions of several characters in Wilde's only novel.

The Picture of Dorian Gray has often been compared to the famous German legend of Faust, immortalized in Christopher Marlowe's sixteenth-century play *Doctor Faustus* and in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's nineteenth-century poem *Faust.* The legend tells of a learned doctor who sells his soul to the devil in return for knowledge and magical abilities. Although Dorian Gray never contracts with the devil, his sacrifice is similar: he trades his soul for the luxury of eternal youth. For its overtones of supernaturalism, its refusal to satisfy popular morality, and its portrayal of culture,

The Picture of Dorian Gray was met with harsh criticism (14). Many considered the novel dangerously subversive.

The fear of a bad—or good—influence is, in fact, one of the novel's primary concerns. As a work that sets forth a philosophy of aestheticism, the novel questions the degree and kind of influence a work of art can have over an individual. Furthermore, since the novel conceives of art as including a well-lived life, it is also interested in the kind of influence one person can have over another. After all, the artful Lord Henry himself has as profound an effect upon Dorian's life as Basil's painting does.

While Lord Henry exercises influence over other characters primarily through his skillful use of language, it is Dorian's beauty that seduces the characters with whom he associates. Basil, a serious artist and rather dull moralist, admits that Dorian has had "some subtle influence" over him; it is this influence that Basil is certain that his painting reveals. As he confides to Lord Henry, "I have put into it some expression of all this curious artistic idolatry." Ultimately, however, Lord Henry's brilliant speech is a much more influential force than aesthetic beauty. His witty and biting epigrams threaten to seduce not only the impressionable young Dorian but the reader as well. Lord Henry's ironic speech cuts through social convention and hypocrisy to reveal unexpected, unpleasant truths.

The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891), as its title implies, has a central character whose nature is grey: his childlike innocence step by step corrupted. First of all Dorian Gray sometimes yearns for his lost innocence, but finally, he becomes so evil that he cannot bear it. On discovering that he cannot recover that which is lost, he grows desperate and accidentally kills himself. Despite Dorian's immoral behavior, the novel has a moral end, as it shows what happens to someone who cannot control evil impulses.

This parallel between life and literature is not the least reason to believe that Dorian Gray provides insight into Wilde's life when read as an autobiography. In breaking up personality into at least three sections – innocence, soul, and corruption – Wilde tries to make sense of each, and test different ways of fitting them together. Watching him try to do this is an excellent study of how he fit together the conflicting units that composed his personality.

Analysis of Major Characters:

Dorian Gray is a radiantly handsome, impressionable, and wealthy young gentleman, whose portrait the artist of becomes extremely concerned with the transience of his and begins to pursue his own pleasure above all else. He devotes himself to having as many experiences as possible, whether moral or immoral, elegant or sordid (10).

At the opening of the novel, exists as something of an ideal: he is the archetype of male and beauty. As such, he captures the imagination of, a painter, and Lord Henry Wotton, a nobleman who imagines fashioning the impressionable Dorian into an unremitting pleasure-seeker. Dorian is exceptionally vain and becomes convinced that his most salient characteristics—his youth and physical attractiveness—are ever waning. The thought of waking one day without these attributes sends Dorian into a tailspin: he curses his fate and pledges his soul if only he could live without bearing the physical burdens of aging and sinning. He longs to be as youthful and lovely as the masterpiece that Basil has painted of him, and he wishes that could age in his stead. His

vulnerability and insecurity in these moments make him excellent clay for Lord Henry's willing hands (6).

Dorian soon leaves Basil's studio for Lord Henry's parlor, where he adopts the tenets of "the new Hedonism" and resolves to live his life as a pleasure-seeker with no regard for conventional morality. His relationship with tests his commitment to this philosophy: his love of the young actress nearly leads him to dispense with Lord Henry's teachings, but his love proves to be as shallow as he is. When he breaks Sibyl's heart and drives her to suicide, Dorian notices the first change in his portrait—evidence that his portrait is showing the effects of age and experience while his body remains ever youthful. Dorian experiences a moment of crisis, as he weighs his guilt about his treatment of Sibyl against the freedom from worry that Lord Henry's philosophy has promised. When Dorian decides to view Sibyl's death as the achievement of an artistic ideal rather than a needless tragedy for which he is responsible, he starts down the steep and slippery slope of his own demise (10).

As Dorian's sins grow worse over the years, his likeness in Basil's portrait grows more hideous. Dorian seems to lack a conscience, but the desire to repent that he eventually feels illustrates that he is indeed human. Despite the beautiful things with which he surrounds himself, he is unable to distract himself from the dissipation of his soul. His murder of Basil marks the beginning of his end: although in the past he has been able to sweep infamies from his mind, he cannot shake the thought that he has killed his friend. Dorian's guilt tortures him relentlessly until he is forced to do away with his portrait. In the end, Dorian seems punished by his ability to be influenced: if the new social order celebrates individualism, as Lord Henry claims, Dorian falters because he fails to establish and live by his own moral code.

Lord Henry Wotton is a charming talker, a famous wit, and a brilliant intellect and soon Dorian falls under his spell so completely. Lord Henry's theories are radical; they aim to shock and purposefully attempt to topple established, untested, or conventional notions of truth. In the end, however, they prove naïve, and Lord Henry himself fails to realize the implications of most of what he says.

Lord Henry is a relatively static character—he does not undergo a significant change in the course of the narrative. He is as coolly possessed of the same dry wit in the final pages of the novel as he is upon his introduction. Because he does not change while Dorian and Basil clearly do, his philosophy seems amusing and enticing in the first half of the book, but improbable and shallow in the second. Lord Henry muses in Chapter Nineteen, for instance, that there are no immoral books; he claims that "the books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world its own shame." But since the decadent book that Lord Henry lends Dorian facilitates Dorian's downfall, it is difficult to accept what Lord Henry says as true.

Although Lord Henry is a self-proclaimed hedonist who advocates the equal pursuit of both moral and immoral experience, he lives a rather staid life. He participates in polite London and attends parties and the theater, but he does not indulge in sordid behavior. Unlike Dorian, he does not lead innocent youths to suicide or travel incognito to the city's most despised and desperate quarters. Lord Henry thus has little notion of the practical effects of his philosophy. His claim that Dorian could never commit a murder because "crime belongs exclusively to the lower orders" demonstrates the limitations of his understanding of the human soul. It is not surprising, then, that he fails to appreciate the meaning of Dorian's downfall.

Basil Hallward is a talented, though somewhat conventionally minded, painter. His love for Dorian Gray, which seems to reflect Oscar Wilde's own affection for his young lover, Lord Alfred Douglas, changes the way he sees; indeed, it defines a new school of expression for him. Basil's portrait of Dorian marks a new phase of his career. Before he created this masterwork, he spent his time painting Dorian in the veils of antiquity—dressed as an ancient soldier or as various romantic figures from mythology. Once he has painted Dorian as he truly is, however, he fears that he has put too much of himself into the work. He worries that his love, which he himself describes as "idolatry," is too apparent, and that it betrays too much of himself. Though he later changes his mind to believe that art is always more abstract than one thinks and that the painting thus betrays nothing except form and color, his emotional investment in Dorian remains constant. He seeks to protect Dorian, voicing his objection to Lord Henry's injurious over Dorian and defending Dorian even after their relationship has clearly dissolved. Basil's commitment to Dorian, which ultimately proves fatal, reveals the genuineness of his love for his favorite subject and his concern for the safety and salvation of Dorian's soul.

Themes:

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.

The Purpose of Art – when *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was first published in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* in 1890, it was decried as immoral. The purpose of art, according to this series of epigrams, is to have no purpose. In order to understand this claim fully, one needs to consider the moral climate of Wilde's time and the Victorian sensibility regarding art and morality. The Victorians believed that art could be used as a tool for social education as illustrated in works by writers such as Charles Dickens and George Gissing. The aestheticism movement sought to free art from this responsibility. This philosophy informed Wilde's life, we must then consider whether his only novel bears it out. As Dorian observes late in the novel, the imagination orders the chaos of life and invests it with meaning, then art, as the fruit of the imagination, cannot help but mean something. Wilde may have succeeded in freeing his art from the confines of Victorian morality, but he has replaced it with a doctrine that is, in its own way, just as restrictive.

The Supremacy of Youth and Beauty – the first principle of aestheticism is that art serves no other purpose than to offer. Throughout *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* beauty reigns. It is a means to revitalize the wearied senses, as indicated by the effect that Basil's painting has on the cynical Lord Henry. It is also a means of escaping the brutalities of the world: Dorian distances himself, not to mention his consciousness, from the horrors of his actions by devoting himself to the study of beautiful things—music, jewels and rare tapestries. Youth and physical attractiveness become valuable commodities. Lord Henry reminds Dorian of as much upon their first meeting, when he laments that Dorian will soon enough lose his most precious attributes. For although beauty and youth remain of utmost importance at the end of the novel—the portrait is, after all, returned to its original form—the novel suggests that the price one must pay for them is exceedingly high. Indeed, Dorian gives nothing less than his soul.

The Superficial Nature of Society – it is no surprise that a society that prizes beauty above all else is a society founded on a love of surfaces. What matters most to Dorian, Lord Henry, and the polite company they keep is not whether a man is good at heart but rather whether he is handsome. As Dorian evolves into the realization of a type, the perfect blend of scholar and socialite, he experiences the freedom to abandon his morals without censure. Indeed, even though, as Basil warns, society's elite question his name and reputation, Dorian is never ostracized. On the contrary, despite his "mode of life," he remains at the heart of the London social scene because of the "innocence" and "purity of his face." (10).

The Negative Consequences of Influence – the painting and the yellow book have a profound effect on Dorian, influencing him to immoral behavior over the course of nearly two decades. Basil's idolatry of Dorian leads to his murder, and Dorian's devotion to Lord Henry's hedonism and the yellow book precipitate his own downfall.

Motifs:

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.

The Picture of Dorian Gray – the picture of Dorian Gray, "the most magical of mirrors," shows Dorian the physical burdens of age and sin from which he has been spared. For a time, Dorian sets his conscience aside and lives his life according to a single goal: achieving pleasure. His painted image, however, asserts itself as his conscience and hounds him with the knowledge of his crimes: there he sees the cruelty he showed to and the blood he spilled killing Basil Hallward.

Homoerotic Male Relationships – the bonds between men play a large role in structuring the novel. Basil's painting depends upon his adoration of Dorian's beauty; similarly, Lord Henry is overcome with the desire to seduce Dorian and mold him into the realization of a type. As a homosexual living in an intolerant society, Wilde asserted this philosophy partially in an attempt to justify his own lifestyle. For Wilde, homosexuality was a sign of refined culture.

The Color White – interestingly, Dorian's trajectory from figure of innocence to figure of degradation can be charted by Wilde's use of the color white. White usually connotes innocence and blankness, as it does when Dorian is first introduced. Basil invokes whiteness when he learns that Dorian has sacrificed his innocence. But the days of Dorian's innocence are over. When the color appears again, in the form of face—"like a white handkerchief"—peering in through a window, it has been transformed from the color of innocence to the color of death (6).

Symbols:

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

The Opium Dens – the dens, located in a remote section of London, represent the sordid state of Dorian's mind. He flees to them at a crucial moment. After killing Basil, Dorian seeks to forget the awfulness of his crimes by losing consciousness. Although he has a canister of opium in his home, he leaves the safety of his neat and proper parlor to travel to the dark dens that reflect the degradation of his soul.

James Vane – is less a believable character than an embodiment of Dorian's tortured conscience. Although he is rather flat caricature, Wilde saw him as essential to the story, adding his character during his revision of 1891. Appearing at the dock and later at Dorian's country estate, James has an almost spectral quality. James appears with his face "like a white handkerchief" and makes Dorian feel guilty for the crimes he has committed.

The Yellow Book – Lord Henry gives Dorian a copy of the yellow book as a gift. Although he never gives the title, Wilde describes the book as a French novel that charts the outrageous experiences of its pleasure-seeking protagonist. The book becomes like Holy Scripture to Dorian, who buys nearly a dozen copies and bases his life and actions on it. The book represents the profound and damaging influence that art can have over an individual and serves as a warning to those who would surrender themselves so completely to such an influence (10).

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