

The Portrait as an Alive Character in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde

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Abstract

The paper studies Oscar Wilde 's only novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, first published in 1890. The novel is about a young man named Dorian Gray who falls in love with his own painted portrait by the artist Basil Hallward . The plot revolves around his corruption and eventual assassination at the hands of his portrait which, in due course, metamorphoses into an alive being to revenge for the distortion of its aesthetic value and beauty. The paper aims to prove that Wilde has intended for the portrait of his hero to take a leading role in the narrative discourse . The title of the novel itself , reveals that its main focus is the portrait of *Dorian Gray* rather than the protagonist himself .

The study shows that the chain of events and relationships are unfolded mainly through a direct reference to Dorian 's portrait . It is also a central part of the ongoing arguments between the painter Basil Hallward and his hedonistic counterpart Lord Henry Wotton about art , life and beauty in the novel : It endorses our understanding of the true nature of their contrasting opinions on the marvel painted by Hallward . Wilde employs the craft of the painted portrait of the hero to express his ideologies concerning the Aesthetic Movement which appeared in the 19th century period and emphasized the cult of beauty in art and literature. The evaluation of this modern concept of art is always seen in a parallel connection with the painted portrait of the hero , Dorian Gray . Ultimately , Wilde's portrait of himself, which undoubtedly is that of Dorian's , precipitates in providing a deep understanding of his personality and his artistic vision in his experimental masterpiece *The portrait of Dorian Gray* . Indeed, it is through Dorian's image and not Dorian's character that the author resolves his conflicts with his prejudiced and sceptic Victorian readers. Key Keywords: Artist – hero conflict, aestheticism, beauty ,art, painting , metamorphoses , self- distortion, hedonism , Gothic elements ,revenge .

Each character , *the painting also being considered a character* , stands for different things throughout the narrative .
John Paul Riquelme ⁽¹⁾

1-Introduction :

Portraits, paintings and statues appear to be dominant features in the works of poets, dramatis and writers of different periods in the history of English and American literature. The term portrait refers to a written description mainly of the protagonist of any literary work. Some of the stimulating examples of such works in English and American literature are the portrait of the Duchess of Ferrara in the poem *My Last Duchess* (1842) by Robert Browning , the statue of the happy prince in *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (1888) by Oscar Wilde , the statue of the unknown citizen in W. H. Auden's poem *The Unknown Citizen* (1940) , the portrait of Isabel Archer in the novel *The Portrait of a Lady* (1880) by the American legend Henry James and finally the portrait of Stephen Dedalus , the hero-artist of James Joyce's masterpiece *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) . These written portraits ,or the painting of pictures via words ,while they provide a deep insight into the principal character's real predicament , they also enhance the stream of the analyses in terms of crystallizing the author's artistic aims and impressions in his work. Therefore, they can be regarded as important literary devices or artistic mediums in the work of the writers of different cultures.

This paper focuses primarily on *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) ⁽²⁾, the only novel written by the famous Irish playwright, poet and author of many short stories during the Victorian era, Oscar Wilde . The novel aimed at depicting Wilde's flamboyant lifestyle, odd thinking and daring homosexuality that had outraged the Victorian society⁽³⁾: "It brought out the controversial man in him and underlined his growing belief in pacifism, social reform and libertarianism which labelled his like mined colleagues the decadents "⁽⁴⁾. However , the

novel is set in the 19th century period .It is about a young man named Dorian Gray who falls in love with his own painted portrait by the artist Basil Hallward . The latter becomes infatuated with Dorian's beauty to the point that he believes it to represent " a new medium for art" (p.27) . The plot revolves around his soul, the consequences of his choices, and his eventual demise. Wilde employs the literary device of the painted portrait of his hero to highlight the principal aesthetic components of the contemporary mode of art which celebrates the cult of beauty in all artistic creations . Hence , his central characters are engaged throughout the novel in serious discussions of the relation between beauty, art and aestheticism . Their evaluations of these modern concepts are always seen in connection with the portrait of the hero which metamorphoses into an alive being in the course of the narrative and figuratively terminates its human double in revenge for the distortion of its aesthetic value and beauty.

The paper is divided into four sections. Section one introduces the main ideas of the paper. Section two first defines the features of the Aesthetic Movement ,which emerged during 19th century period in Europe and then examines Wilde' personal attitude and treatment of aestheticism . The manner in which the three male characters are involved in discussing the painting in terms of youth and beauty will be thoroughly investigated in this section . The core of the analyses of section three is the corruption of the hero , his tragic death and the consequent disfigurement and revival of the beauty of his portrait at the end of the novel. The fourth section is the conclusion which highlights the main findings of the paper.

2 –The Portrait as a Device in Foreshadowing Wilde's Aesthetic Perspectives :

Aesthetic is a branch of philosophy which deals with the nature of art ,beauty and of artistic judgment . The Aesthetic Movement , whose motto was "art for art's sake"⁽⁵⁾, swept through North America and England in the late 19th century and touched every sphere of the fine and decorative arts. The supporters of the Movement tend to hold that all arts should provide first and foremost a refined sensuous pleasure: Beauty is the prime motive for art , thus the artists and writers should consider it to be the ultimate goal of their artistic or literary achievements . Consequently, they strongly reacted against the Victorian utilitarian conception of art . Instead, the Aesthetes of the Movement argued that art must not be confounded by didactic or moral messages; the prime need is only to be beautiful . Accordingly , the writers of this Movement highly embraced the notion of the existing correspondence between words and colors in a literary work .⁽⁶⁾The Movement is perhaps best personified by the Irish dramatist , poet and novelist Oscar Wilde in his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* . This work reveals, in many ways his enthusiastic and wholehearted embrace of the values of aestheticism : "Wilde's insistence on the separation between art and life, and his claim for art's priority in that pairing, point significantly to questions of aesthetic representation and reception that span the history of critical discourse from the classical age to the present"⁽⁷⁾ . He states in *The Preface To The Picture Of Dorian Gray*(1854-1900) :

The artist is the creator of beautiful things . To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim .The critic is he who can translate into another manner or a new material his impression of beautiful things ... Those who find beautiful meanings in beautiful things are the cultivated. For these there is hope. They are the elect to whom beautiful things mean only beauty.⁽⁸⁾

The Picture of Dorian Gray opens with a colorful and detailed description of the studio of the painter Basil Hallward , which mirrors his personality as an artist . He is working on a full – length portrait of an amazingly handsome young man , whose beauty cannot be overlooked by his beholders .Hallward is a respected but reclusive and restless painter with intricate duality of vision . As an artist , he essentially values beauty , since it inspires his paintings. At the same time , he declares that art is more important than beauty, even if art springs from that beauty. He expresses this viewpoint to Lord Henry Wotton , who is present with him in the studio waiting anxiously for Dorian's picture to be completed and displayed in public . He tells Hallward : " A portrait like this would set you far above all the young men in England, and make the old men quite jealous, if old men are ever capable of any emotion " (P.21) . Yet, Hallward insists that his interest in Dorian's beauty stems from its being a supreme motive for his new art . He fears that his objective in painting might be misapprehended by people , because of their ignorance of the " new medium for art ":

I sometimes think, Harry, that there are only two eras of any importance in the world's history. The first is *the appearance of a new medium for art, and the second is the appearance of a new personality for art also.... I wonder will you understand me?* ...The merely visible presence of this lad ... defines for me the lines of a fresh school, a school that is to have in it all the passion of the romantic spirit, all the perfection of the spirit that is

Greek. The harmony of soul and body -- how much that is! We in our madness have separated the two, and have invented a realism that is vulgar, an ideality that is void. (p.p. 27-28 ,my italics) .

Hallward's infatuation with Dorian's exceptional beauty prompts him to render it with some vague romantic and gothic coloring ⁽⁹⁾ .He passionately yearns to immortalize Dorian's beauty in his painting as a solid reminder of his perception of new approach to art . Henceforth ,the portrait of the protagonist submerges into a means of depicting his Wilde - like ambiguity concerning the kind of beauty that is advocated by the Aesthetic Movement ; whether it is highlighting the supremacy of the eternal inner beauty or the physical one which solely appeals to the senses . Wilde believes that Basil represents him best in the novel : " Both Basil and Wilde are artists who use their artistic skills to explore various forms of beauty"⁽¹⁰⁾.Like Wilde, Hallward is passionately involved in exploring the relationship between life and art , i.e. the image of a man (life) in mirroring his inner soul (art) .

Unlike Hallward ,Lord Henry Wotton , who is also present in the studio ,applauds the significance of physical beauty . Indeed , he is the most vocal and influential on the subject of youth and beauty in the novel . He is the story's antagonist ,who also resembles Oscar Wilde at certain points .Likewise ,he perceives the value of beauty and art in a pure Hedonistic form . He believes that What really matters in life is holding on to physical beauty and sensual fulfilment . Thus , he is portrayed to be the villain of the story and a very seductive person " who seeks to convince the general public to be hedonists"⁽¹¹⁾ . Lord Henry Wotton 's character highlights the notion of beauty in art , but from a totally different angle of vision than that of Hallward's . He even criticizes the latter's insistence on casting his masterpiece in a veil of antiquity : "Your mysterious young friend ... is some beautiful creature who should be always here in winter when we have no flowers to look at, and always here in summer when we want something to chill our intelligence " (p.22).

It is worth stating here that from the very start of the novel ,Wilde focuses on giving the magical portrait a leading role in mapping Hallward's and his opposite counterpart, Lord Henry Wotton's divided perspectives about the theories of aestheticism . As such, the portrait becomes an integrating force in the course of the narrative of the first aesthete in the studio . The progressive dimensions of the following chapters will be also denoted through the means of a direct reference to it in the course of the heightened conversation between the central characters .Dorian's portrait embodies another issue crucially related to the author's homosexual potential, which has caused a serious row among the people of his time. From this angle of vision , the portrait links Wilde's predicament with his central characters who are, as the portrait itself ,conveying aspects of his personal life and artistic vision .Wilde points out that his complex nature is amply portrayed" by three distinct positions, the artist (writer), the model (character), and the audience(the reader). The three major characters in the novel Basil, Dorian and Lord Henry represent these three positions symbolically "⁽¹²⁾.

However , in the course of argument about Dorian's painting , Hallward shows his utter reluctance of taking his artistic piece for public exhibition at Grosvenor . He fears of being criticized for the amount of passion he has revealed for the extraordinary male beauty in the picture . He is aware that the painting , which he has made is not that of *Mona Lisa*,⁽¹³⁾ but of a charming handsome young man , whose beauty is the essence of his artistic inspiration. He claims to Lord Henry Wotton: " Courage has gone out of our race. Perhaps we never really had it. The terror of society, which is the basis of morals, the terror of God, which is the secret of religion -- these are the two things that govern us "(p. 35) . Hallward's reservation about his painting is a straightforward delineation of Wilde's own consciousness about his own abhorred position in his decadent society .The wild Wilde is probably embarrassed with his " attraction towards characters of the same sexIt was notoriously labelled unclean, effeminate, and contaminating as it effectively distorted the views of conventional morality "⁽¹⁴⁾ . Like Wilde , when writing his *Portrait of Dorian Gray* , Hallward ponders the possibility that ,rather than encapsulating his profound potentiality as an aesthete ,the painting might be taken as a proof of his own homosexual indulgence . Indeed , the words that he uses to describe his instant capture by Gray's beauty , during his first encounter with him at Lady Brandon's party ,are not expected to be of a man describing his male partner , but rather of a lover charged with a melancholic passion for his female beloved :

When our eyes met, I felt that I was growing pale. A curious sensation of terror came over me. I knew that I had come face to face with someone whose mere personality was so fascinating that, if I allowed it to do so, it would absorb my whole nature, my whole soul, my very art itself. ...But he is much more to me than a model or a

sitter. .. his beauty is such that art cannot express it. ..But in some curious way -- I wonder will you understand me? ...I see things differently, I think of them differently. I can now recreate life in a way that was hidden from me before ...he seems to me little more than a lad, I know he likes me. Of course I flatter him dreadfully. I find a strange pleasure in saying things to him that I know I shall be sorry for having said. As a rule, he is charming to me, and we sit in the studio and talk of a thousand things ... I feel, Harry, that I have given away my whole soul to some one who treats it as if it were a flower to put in his coat, a bit of decoration to charm his vanity, an ornament for a summer's day...The moment I met you I saw that you were quite unconscious of what you really are, of what you really might be. There was so much in you that charmed me that I felt I must tell you something about yourself (p.24; p.p. 28-29 ;p.38).

Hallward fears the probability of the portrait arousing the reaction of its being an emblem of his elevation of its human model, Dorian Gray . Thus, he insists on denying himself the privilege of taking it for public exhibition . He reiterates to the nobleman Lord Henry Wotton :

... 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 in it the secret of my own soul ...I see things differently, I think of them differently. I can now recreate life in a way that was hidden from me before. ... The merely visible presence of this lad ... defines for me the lines of a fresh school, a school that is to have in it all the passion of the romantic spirit, all the perfection of the spirit that is Greek. The harmony of soul and body -- how much that is! We in our madness have separated the two, and have invented a realism that is vulgar, an ideality that is voidBecause, without intending it, I have put into it some expression of all this curious artistic idolatry, of which, of course, I have never cared to speak to him. He knows nothing about it. He shall never know anything about it. But the world might guess it, and I will not bare my soul to their shallow prying eyes. My heart shall never be put under their microscope. There is too much of myself in the thing, Harry -- too much of myself ...We live in an age when men treat art as if it were meant to be a form of autobiography. We have lost the abstract sense of beauty. Someday I will show the world what it is; and for that reason the world shall never see my portrait of Dorian Gray (p.25 ; p.p. 28-29).

Hallward's decision to keep his painting within the shadows of his grand studio is also exacerbated by his innate worries about the possibility of its inducing some corrupting influence on Dorian himself . He tells Lord Wotton : "Because, without intending it, I have put into it some expression of all this curious artistic idolatry, of which, of course, I have never cared to speak to him. He knows nothing about it. ...But the world might guess it, and I will not bare my soul to their shallow prying eyes. My heart shall never be put under their microscope" (p.p. 28-29) .

3 The Conversion of Roles : The Portrait Metamorphoses into Alive Being :

As Hallward has anticipated , the unveiling of the portrait is the cornerstone which alters the hero's life dramatically . Dorian's initial glimpse of his painting is permeated with unarticulated feelings of anxiety and exultation . For the first time in his life , he becomes aware of the prevailing fact of his owning the wonder of beauty . He no longer requires the mirror of his private room to reflect his blossoming youth and beauty .They are immortalized through the brushstrokes of the dedicated artist . Dorian's eventual overwhelming pride in his beauty and raptures are depicted in the symbolic act of "burying his face in the great cool lilac-blossoms" (p.37) ,while he is in Hallward's garden . This spontaneous act alludes to his conscious desire of assimilating his beauty with all beautiful things that animate creative artists . Like the handsome hunter Narcissus in the Greek mythology ,who he saw his own reflection in a pool and fell in love with it ,Dorian becomes saturated with this inflated romantic image of himself . He decides that his beauty will be his licenses of initiation in this world .He will be become its shepherd and guardian ,since it ensures his uniqueness in this world .He is utterly blind to its inevitable withering by time and age . Lord Henry Wotton's subsequent assertion of this devastating fact climaxes in converting Dorian's self-indulgent daydream into a nightmare.

Lord Henry Wotton finds great values in beauty and youth , calling them all powerful and unquestionable. He believed in the pre-eminence of youth and beauty. He confirms to Dorian ,while in the studio, that his beauty and youth are only immortalized in the painting which Hallward has made of him . The reality is that beautiful people are elevated and adored in a true aesthetic fashion only to fall from grace , as age tragically consumes the full force of their beauty and youth . As a hedonist , Lord Henry ascertains to Dorian that the only things worth living for in life are youth, beauty and the fulfilment of the senses:

You have a wonderfully beautiful face, Mr. Gray. Don't frown. You have. And beauty is a form of genius -- is higher, indeed, than genius, as it needs no explanation. ...To me, beauty is the wonder of wonders. It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible. . . . Yes, Mr. Gray, the gods have been good to you. But what the gods give they quickly take away. You have only a few years in which to live really, perfectly, and fully. When your youth goes, your beauty will go with it, and then you will suddenly discover that there are no triumphs left for you, or have to content yourself with those mean triumphs that the memory of your past will make more bitter than defeats. Every month as it wanes brings you nearer to something dreadful. Time is jealous of you, and wars against your lilies and your roses... .Ah! realize your youth while you have it. Don't squander the gold of your days, listening to the tedious, trying to improve the hopeless failure, or giving away your life to the ignorant, the common, and the vulgar. These are the sickly aims, the false ideals, of our age. Live! Live the wonderful life that is in you! Let nothing be lost upon you. Be always searching for new sensations. Be afraid of nothing. . . . For there is such a little time that your youth will last -- such a little time ...we never get back our youth. The pulse of joy that beats in us at twenty becomes sluggish. Our limbs fail, our senses rot. We degenerate into hideous puppets, haunted by the memory of the passions of which we were too much afraid, and the exquisite temptations that we had not the courage to yield to. Youth! Youth! There is absolutely nothing in the world but youth! (p.p.38-40)

In the light of Lord Henry's prolonged preaching, Dorian's attention subsides from the portrait itself to the elevation of the transient powers of beauty and youth that are captured in it. He imagines that if he were in the place of his portrait, an immortal and beautiful piece of artifact, then he will be able to drink the cup of sensual pleasure to its full for the rest of his life. Dorian's longing to remain young and handsome forever leads him, as Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, to besiege the unknown forces to spare him and let the painting suffer the fate of losing its physical grandeur instead. He did not ask for the gift of supernatural power in the bargain. He merely sought immortal youth and beauty: 'Eternal youth, infinite passion, pleasures subtle and secret, wild joys and wilder sins -- he was to have all these things... that was all' (p.119). At this stage, he is totally oblivious of the stifling reality that once his wish is granted, he will be stripped of his soul and whatever relates him to humanity. He will become a barren image or an echo of himself, incapable of feeling any remorse for his evil actions to follow. They will all be transferred to the portrait which profoundly changes into an alive being instead of him. Wilde poignantly reverses Dorian's role with that of the portrait's. This deliberate twisting of positions brings into the mind Ovid's narrative poem *Metamorphoses* in which the legendary Cypriot sculptor Pygmalion falls in love with the ivory statue of a girl he has made. He begs the goddess Aphrodite to transfer the lifeless object into a real woman so that he can marry her. In both cases the switching of roles results in turbulent disasters for the protagonists of both works.

Indeed, we are told that every time Dorian enters the room to check the painting, he notices that it has lost part of its glamour, while his beauty and youth remain unblemished, and perpetually renewed. Dorian's status overwhelms him with unprecedented feeling of self-satisfaction; he imagines that he has escaped the fate of aging and losing the gifts that identify his existence. In his article *Oscar Wilde's Aesthetic Gothic: Walter Pater, Dark Enlightenment, and The Picture of Dorian Gray*, John Paul Riquelme provides some an illuminating justification for Dorian's fragility and blind guidance by Lord Henry's standpoint of hedonism. He maintains that "he is both young and naive and absorbs the knowledge and wisdom of the elder Dorian's behavior and his thinking are, by contrast, chosen for him" (p.621). However, Dorian's fulfilled wish transforms him into a heartless person who treats people with indifference and dismisses them at his convenience. He is utterly overcome by a wayward lack of conscience. In retrospect, instead of being a reincarnation of his enchanting youth and charm, the portrait starts to reflect the dark savagery within him. It seems that all his sins are materialized in the grotesque looking artefact, which now barely shows any resemblance to him. The case here is that Wilde is pretty much involved in expounding "the dark side of both beauty and art"⁽¹⁶⁾ in human life. It is worth mentioning here that, at this crucial point in the narrative, Dorian's portrait provides a true measure for testing the implication of Hallward's as well as Lord Wotton's aesthetic values and Wilde's own through them. Yet, Dorian's portrait is going to enact another dynamic and determining role in the following chapters. It will mark the stages of the protagonist's moral degeneration and transformation into a hollow man.

As the hero becomes captivated with his new born desire to live as an enchanting piece of art, the inherent evil in him prompts his involvement in a series of grotesque and terrifying conducts. They climax in the

cold blooded act of killing the painter in vengeance for his innate self – deterioration and before this in contributing to the suicide of his female companion and lover, Sibyl Vane.

Sibyl Vane is a young actress who performs in a theatre in a London's slum. Dorian's relationship with her reveals his character under the hypnotic influences of Lord Wotton. Above all things, Dorian adores Sibyl's acting : He loves her only because she is a gifted actress who can exacerbate his infinite sensual pleasure, when performing Shakespeare's plays on the stage . He could not perceive that beyond the reality of her being a perfect actress ,lays a woman who cherishes a deep spiritual love for him to the extent that she can no longer fake or incarnate this kind of sublime sentiment on the stage . She imagines that because she is experiencing a real love with her prince charming , she cannot perform a fictitious love scene anymore . Her failure in doing so culminates in Dorian's cruel act of abandoning her through breaking their engagement. Realizing that she cannot consummate her true love for him , she kills herself .Dorian receives Sibyl's tragic death through Lord Wotton with utter indifference , for, apart from being a means for satisfy his blind yearning for pure sensual satisfaction ,she has meant nothing to him . Even when he realizes that he is primly responsible for her suicide, he does not convey any sign of regret for his merciless destruction of her life . Yet, when he returns home he is surprised to see that his portrait looks like an alive individual who "now sneers " (p.119)at him in a way to remind him of his cruelty towards Sibyl . It has altered into a living organism which forcefully curses his innate vulgarity and lack of feeling of pain or remorse towards the deceased actress Sibyl Vane: "The picture...would be to him the visible emblem of conscience As it had revealed to him his own body, so it would reveal to him his own soul" (p. 107 ;p.120) .His earlier experiences of joy and elation are replaced by the agonizing truth that the painting is now recording his absorption in narcissistic and sinful corruptions day by day for him . The portrait " was to bear the burden of his shame ... the burden that should have been his own"(p.119) .⁽¹⁵⁾It witnesses the wildness and degeneration of his soul , as he surrenders to the worship of infinite pleasure :

A feeling of pain crept over him as he thought of the desecration that was in store for the fair face on the canvas. Once, in boyish mockery of Narcissus, he had kissed, or feigned to kiss, those painted lips that now smiled so cruelly at him. Morning after morning he had sat before the portrait wondering at its beauty....Was it to alter now with every mood to which he yielded? Was it to become a monstrous and loathsome thing, to be hidden away in a locked room, to be shut out from the sunlight that had so often touched to brighter gold the waving wonder of its hair? The pity of it! the pity of it !(pp. 119-120)

Even when there were times he earnestly craved for repentance and salvation ,Dorian could not eradicate his damnation " by the high indifference of joy" (p.216). After eighteen disturbing years of his life , he realizes ,like Doctor Faustus , that he has approached the zone of no return from his aggressive evilness :“I have done too many dreadful things in my life. I am not going to do anymore. I began my good actions yesterday” (p. 240) . When Dorian realizes the true nature of the existing connection between him and his portrait ,he begs it " to help him be a better personHe would not sin " (p. 107). But all were in vain . As usual , the cynical Lord Henry was around, contented in his role as the devil's advocate Mephistopheles in *Doctor Faustus* , hinders him from following his desires for self-resurrection . Ironically , he informs Dorian: “I can finish your idyll for you. You gave her good advice, and broke her heart. That was the beginning of your reformation " (P.241). Dorian kept oscillating ,like Shakespeare's Hamlet , in a state of indecision . He hoped for redemption ,while his sins were increasing : "Not one blossom of his loveliness would ever fade. Not one pulse of his life would ever weaken. Like the gods of the Greeks, he would be strong, and fleet, and joyous. What did it matter what happened to the coloured image on the canvas? He would be safe. That was everything " (P.240) . Hallward attempts to awaken him to the dangers of this duality in his life on the very day of his assassination by him : "But you, Dorian, with your pure, bright, innocent face, and your marvelous untroubled youth – I can't believe anything against you" (p.172) . Nonetheless , he carries with his destruction actions ,thinking that his outer beauty will shield him from his aching sins and violations .

Dorian tragic death in the concluding chapter of the novel highlights Wilde's originality in endowing the portrait with the elevated role of a redeemer in the novel . As Dorian's life and immortality become unbearable and suffocating for him , particularly when he realizes that he has passed the stage beyond reformation, he chooses to end his ordeal. He imagines that by destroying the painting ,he will break the magic spell and retreat to his former life , prior to his encounter with his double in Hallward's studio . He takes a knife and creeps to the room , where the portrait is hidden and contrive to stab it and cut into pieces . The protagonist of Alfred Tennyson's poem *Tithonus* begs the goddess of sun Aurora to release him from the

humiliation of aging and take him back to the human world .He feels that he too old for her, when she keeps renewing her dazzling youth and beauty every morning . Interestingly, Wilde reverses the situation in his novel : It is the beautiful and young Dorian who seeks rescue and metaphorical resurrection from the disfigured and aging portrait . The subtle result of his striving puzzles Wilde's critics and engenders multiple contradictory interpretations of it .Like the zero end in modern writing , the reader is given the freedom to make their own individual perception of the end and interpreted accordingly .

However, when the servants enter to inspect the room, they stumble on their master's dead body . It looked aging and ugly , while the portrait on the wall appeared gleaming with exquisite beauty. The Portrait has figuratively stabbed the man , whose crucifixion and ultimate release are carried out in the ambiguous and dark mannerism of the gothic narration .like Faustus , Dorian had transgressed the rules of nature when he contrived to live young and beautiful forever ,thus he was punished by death. According to the power which the portrait has been endowed , it seems that it is the one who has actually revenged itself at the end by killing the person who molested its significance as an articulating piece of artefact . The mystery and suspense of the final scene highlight Wilde's duplicity of standards of writing ; namely his deliberate fusion of the contemporary aestheticism with the Gothicism of ancient classics . According to Riquelme the "merger is possible, and inevitable, because of the tendency of Gothic writing to present a fantastic world of indulgence and boundary-crossing and the tendency of the aesthetic ... to press beyond conventional boundaries and to recognize terror within beauty " (p.610) .

The last significant point to be ascertained in this section is that , despite the novel's ambiguity and complex style , the portrait of its hero will survive as everlasting evidence of Wilde's innovative and pioneering status among his contemporaries .

4 Conclusions:

Oscar Wilde repeatedly acknowledges the fact that the central characters in *The picture of Dorian Gray* represent him :'' Basil Hallward reflects what he thinks he is, Lord Henry epitomizes what the world thinks of him and Dorian foreshadows what he be like in the future ''⁽¹⁷⁾. The foregoing analyses of the novel illustrates that , in actuality , it is the portrait alone which primarily highlights the readers perception of the work. Wilde has intended for portrait of his hero to take the leading role in the narrative discourse . It is depicted both as an extended allegorical medium and an alive figure , epitomizing the author's and the characters' scales of thinking , in addition to its being the core of the unity and alternating shifts in the narrative . This is implicit in the title itself ,*The Portrait of Dorian Gray* ; its main focus is the portrait of Dorian rather than the protagonist himself . The study shows that it is through the portrait that the chain of events and relationships are unfolded. The portrait is the central part of the ongoing arguments between the painter Basil Hallward and his hedonistic counterpart Lord Henry Wotton about art , life and beauty in the studio. It endorses our understanding of the true nature of their contrasting opinions on the marvel painted by Hallward .

As the novel proceeds, the portrait enact as an embodiment of Dorian's fear of aging and, hence, losing his exceptional gift of beauty by time ,which in retrospect prompts his gothic aspiration to sell his soul for pertaining immortal youth and beauty. In the following scenes the portrait becomes an emblem of the hero's chaotic self-destruction in seeking an alternative supernatural or unrealistic existence. Yet, he has to be punished for transgressing the laws of nature .The disfigured portrait metamorphoses into an alive person, endowed with a high conscience. It judges every single move in the hero's life with utter contempt, reminding him of his unredeemable corruption in pursuing a life of sheer sensual fulfilment. Allegorically speaking ,the portrait symbolizes Dorian's conscious struggle with his own vanity , guilt and moral- deterioration .

The vengeance scene is the climax which restores both the hero and his painted image from their predicaments of nihilism and role-playing . The scene could be an illusion for Wilde's personal wish of revenging himself from all those who misunderstood the true value of his art. However , to free himself from the magic spell ,Dorian has to accept the reality of growing old and losing his youth and beauty by time .To be emancipated from its disfigurement, the portrait has to regain its former status as an immortal piece of artefact . Thus, Dorian enters the room where the portrait is kept with the intention of destroying it and break his contract with the devil . The result is devastating. His ultimate termination at the hand of his portrait, through stabbing him with the very knife he brought with him into the room shrouds the novel with the cyclic dimension of the medieval drama : The novel end where it begins ; namely the discussion of the ambiguity related to Dorian's painting. Significantly, the final scene highlights Wilde's personal belief in the role of art in the discerning truth about life and in teaching man about himself. Wild's portrait of himself, which is undoubtedly that of Dorian's , has precipitated in providing a deep understanding of his personality and his

artistic vision in his experimental masterpiece *The portrait of Dorian Gray*. As Hallward' declares in the opening scene, "there is nothing that Art cannot express" (p.17). It is through Dorian's image and not Dorian character that the author resolves his conflicts with his prejudiced and sceptic readers.

Notes :

- 1-Riquelme, John Paul . *Oscar Wilde's Aesthetic Gothic: Walter Pater, Dark Enlightenment, and The Picture of Dorian Gray*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 46:3 (Fall 2000): 609-631 , p. 614 . Here after cited as Riquelme .
- 2-Wilde ,Oscar.*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Penguin Classics , 2006, ISBN 978-0141442037. All quotations from the novel will from this edition.
- 3-In his autobiography of Oscar Wilde, Richard Ellmann notes that " he was an accomplished aesthete, profoundly affected by beauty and discreetly subscribed to flamboyant dressing and lifestyle" . Ellmann, Richard . *Oscar Wilde* : published by Vintage , 1988 ,p.136.
- 4- For further discussion see "The reflection of characters in "The picture of Dorian Gray"" June 3rd, 2010 | Author: JasmineCopyright © 2005-2013 ArticlesBase .com .Retrieved 23-10-2013.
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- 9-Clausson, Nils . "Culture and corruption": *Paterian self-development versus Gothic* : www.proessay.com/essay-topics/oscar-wilde/culture-and-corruption Retrieve 20-11-2013.
- 10-*The Picture of Dorian Gray By Oscar Wilde* . Published by valthewriter, February 28, 2011 <http://bookstove.com/book-talk/the-picture-of-dorian-gray-by-oscar-wilde/#ixzz2kW6pn1p8>.Retrieved 28-10-2013.
- 11-Ibid.
- 12-Ibid.
- 13- For further details see Requileme,"Mona Lisa as Dark Narcissus/Narcissus as Medusa"p.p. 621-629 .
- 14-*The Reflection of Characters in The picture of Dorian Gray* . Articlesbase<http://www.articlesbase.com/college-and-university-articles/the-reflection-of-characters-in-the-picture-of-dorian-gray-2229012.html>.Retrieved 17-11-2013 .
- 15- For more details see *Reflections of author personality in different characters of 'The picture of Dorian Gray'*by Oscar Wilde .Published by valthewriter, February 28, 2011 ,<http://bookstove.com/book-talk/the-picture-of-dorian-gray-by-oscar-wilde/#ixzz21Yw2qIPA>. Retrieved 8-11-2013 .
- 16-For more details see Riquelme ,p.219;pp.22-23.
- 17-Holland, Merlin .*The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde* : Henry Holt and Co. , 1998 , p. 352.