Sebastian Melmoth: A Biographical Approach to Oscar Wilde's Catholic in The Picture of Dorian Gray

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes the Catholic themes within Oscar Wilde's 1890 novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In order to accurately do so it will establish proper definitions of gothic fiction and Catholicism. Moreover, within this analysis on Catholicism and gothic fiction, it will also establish which Catholic themes are significant within the analysis of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. After these definitions and particular themes are established, an inquiry into Wilde's personal life, and his relationship to Catholicism, will be executed. Eventually, an analysis of the novel itself, combining the Catholic themes and the biographical information presented in the earlier chapters, will be carried out. After these analyses are carried out, this thesis will establish that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* illustrates Wilde's fear of being completely liberated. The judgment he received from the Marquess of Queensberry, the heteronormative Protestant community he grew up in, and even his lover Lord Alfred Douglas would eventually turn his desires to feel as liberated as his mother into a phobia of being completely free, which is depicted in his own conviction of Dorian Gray.

Contents

Introduction

This thesis explores the influence of Roman Catholicism on Oscar Wilde and especially his seminal novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (*TPDG*). *TPDG* is a gothic novel first published in the July 1890 edition of *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*. The story details how a beautiful young boy wishes to have eternal youth and beauty, after seeing his current youth and beauty personified in a portrait of him. However, after his wish is granted, he discovers the painting will forever reveal the darkest secrets that the wrinkles on his face can no longer tell. Currently, because of the omission of religious settings and religious figures in the novel, the religious undertones in *TPDG* are often disregarded by general readers of the novel. However, as religion, and Catholicism in particular, has often been interwoven into gothic fiction, it would seem logical to further investigate the religious themes in this gothic novel. Moreover, when examining Wilde's personal life, one is able to discover Wilde's personal affection for Catholicism. Lastly, one aspect of Catholicism in particular, the confessional, has attracted Wilde in particular. This is visible in *TPDG* in how it showcases a preeminent wish to express oneself freely. Therefore, this thesis analyzes the question whether *TPDG* is actually symbolic for Wilde's personal life and his relation towards Catholicism. In order to accurately assess this, in chapter one the focus will shift towards properly defining the concepts of Catholicism and gothic fiction. After having affirmed the proper definitions, chapter two will take a closer look at Wilde's personal life, his affection for Catholicism and his relationship with his sexuality. Ultimately, in chapter three an analysis of *TPDG* will be made, researching whether the Catholic themes mentioned in chapter one are present in the novel, and to what degree. After the analyses present in all three chapters it will become clear that *TPDG* was in fact symbolic for Wilde's much desired confession of the aspects of his life that were not in compliance with his heteronormative Protestant background, all the while expressing his fears for the consequences of this liberal confession.

1. Catholicism and Gothic Fiction

As mentioned in the introduction, this thesis explores the question whether the Catholic influences that were present in Wilde's personal life affected the creation of his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray (TPDG)*. In order to clearly define the influence of Catholic doctrine and tradition on the novel, it is important to elaborate on some of the key aspects of the Catholicism faith and practice. On top of that, seeing that *TPDG* is considered a work of gothic fiction, it is also necessary to frame what exactly constitutes gothic fiction. These aforementioned elaborations on both Catholicism and gothic fiction will both be accounted for in this chapter. As British gothic fiction has been engaged with Catholicism from the outset, it is especially significant to trace the interrelatedness between the gothic and Catholicism; only then can Wilde's Catholic gothic be properly understood.

1.1. Gothic Fiction

Firstly, the focus will shift towards gothic fiction. Section 1.1 is separated into two sub-sections, each covering a specific era of gothic fiction: the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century (classic) gothic and the late-nineteenth-century gothic. This distinction between classic gothic and late-nineteenth-century gothic will be based on a shift in the gothic called "the turn inward," which will be further elaborated upon in section 1.1.2. As Davison notes in the first volume of *History of the Gothic*, the 1820s is when this shift mostly materialized itself (20). Therefore, this thesis utilizes the same borders between classic gothic and late-nineteenth century gothic Davison and her predecessor Killeen utilize in the first two volumes of *History of the Gothic*, namely 1764-1824 for classic gothic and 1825-1914 for late-nineteenth century gothic. Considering *TPDG* was initially published in 1890, gothic literature after 1915 will not be accounted for in this thesis.

1.1.1. Classic Gothic

Gothic fiction is a genre of fiction that focuses on the *unheimlich*, the uncanny. In order to instill a feeling of unease in the reader, gothic fiction merges the line between reality and fantasy, for instance (Hogle 2). This conflation between reality and fantasy materializes in the way the setting and most characters are still realistically portrayed, while the antagonists exhibit unrealistic, unfamiliar, and sometimes supernatural traits. Because of the realistic characters and setting, the reader is still able to identify with most of these characters. However, the unfamiliar traits of the antagonists engender a sizable sensation of fear in the reader, because the latter is merely mortal and does not possess the supernatural powers the former does. Moreover, the jarring juxtaposition of the realistic protagonist with the unrealistic antagonist causes the reader to be even more on edge in scenes of conflict between the two.

Aside from the merger of fantasy and reality, gothic fiction is also known – but at the same time notorious – for its excessive storytelling. Even early writers of gothic fiction applied excessive plot structures and narrative techniques to tell their lugubrious stories of sin, guilt and divine intervention. As Nathaniel Leach notes, Charles Maturin's 1820 gothic novel *Melmoth the Wanderer* employed excessiveness into the description of the gory details of the suffering John Melmoth endures (21). Significantly, *Melmoth* is one of the seminal Catholic gothic texts of the classic gothic period. Next to the visceral excesses of its imagery, it contains a labyrinthine plot that explores sin, suffering and sacrifice through the trope of the Eternal Wanderer. As such, the novel invokes an image of the earthly sinner's life as an endless purgatory. Furthermore, throughout the novel, the uncanny nature of the juxtaposition between the familiar and the unfamiliar is also incorporated. The protagonist, John Melmoth, lives in Dublin, visits a funeral and is told the many stories that are incorporated in the story in that place. This setting of the story is very mundane and familiar

to the Protestant British reader. On the other hand, the seemingly supernatural powers Melmoth possesses contrast this familiarity. Moreover, the stories Monçada tells are mostly quite unfamiliar to the Protestant British reader because they are set in a monastery, an island in the Indian Ocean, Spain, and Yorkshire. Yorkshire, naturally, is not unfamiliar to the British reader. However, the inclusion of this short diversion of the story might be foreboding of the final scene, where Melmoth appears to John Melmoth and Monçada. Both the final scene and the scene in Yorkshire dilute the line between an unfamiliar, distant, supernatural story and the familiar, close by settings of Dublin and Yorkshire. While the excesses of gothic fiction were often the focal point of mockery from critics within Protestant British society (Hogle 1), much of the excess, in works like Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) and Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1797), relied on the grotesque representation of Catholic institutions, practices and doctrine.

Furthermore, the uncanny nature of gothic fiction creates discord between the known and the unknown. Very often, the uneasy aspects of a gothic novel were situated outside of society and often in "antiquated or seemingly antiquated space[s]" (Hogle 2). In British gothic novels, such spaces were often Catholic spaces, like monasteries, nunneries, and cathedral ruins. By connecting these mundane Catholic spaces with terrifying stories, the writers of British gothic fiction instilled a sense of fear in the Protestant reader of occurrences outside of mainstream society. What is more, most instances of gothic fiction were situated in mainland, and often Catholic, Europe. This type of setting has been used from its origin in 1764, as seen in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (Davison 29), up until the latter half of the nineteenth century. Such settings further highlighted this distinction between what is civilized and what is savage in the eyes of Protestant eighteenth and nineteenth-century British readers (O'Malley 72).

1.1.2. The Turn Inward: Late-Nineteenth-Century Gothic

As briefly mentioned earlier, over the course of the nineteenth century, a shift appeared in literary gothic settings. Various later nineteenth-century novels were situated in countries closer to home for the British reader and moved from the countryside to the city (O'Malley 102). London, for instance, became a central setting in many works of late Victorian Gothic (Womack 168). Robert Louis Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde* (1886) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) are just the two most famous examples.

Moreover, as Julian Wolfreys notes, another shift in gothic fiction started to appear throughout the nineteenth century (31); the unknown altered from signifying an outsider to society to signifying a part of the human mind; the uncanny within ourselves. This "turn inward," as this shift in gothic fiction from the external towards the internal is called, also shifted the object of fear in these novels from supernatural beings to the human unconsciousness. By means of identification with the uncanny experiences of the main character, readers could potentially experience this psychologically grounded uncanny themselves (Hogle 3). Moreover, because of this identification with the uncanny aspects of the human mind, the reader was also confronted with their own personal mind. Therefore, in late-nineteenth-century gothic novels that employed the turn inward, undesirable thoughts, actions, and – in a religious context – vices within the reader would come to the fore front in their mind through the identification with the characters. This allowed authors to explore more psychological themes within their novel, because the uncanniness of the human mind instilled a significant amount of fear within the reader through the aforementioned identification.

The shift from the rural mainland of Europe to urban areas in the United Kingdom is also present in *Dorian Gray*, which is mostly situated in London. Furthermore, in *Dorian Gray* the terrifying unknown comes from within Dorian himself, which lines up perfectly with

the turn inward. He is the person performing terrifying deeds, even at times terrifying himself in the novel, by viewing the personification of his actions through the painting.

1.2. Catholicism

Gothic fiction and Catholicism have always had a strong link to each other. From early works such as Walpole's 1764 novel *The Castle of Otranto* to more recent works, such as William Peter Blatty's 1971 novel *The Exorcist*, Catholicism has always played a significant part within the gothic. However, before dissecting these links and similarities it is necessary to grasp the essence of the both of them. In the previous section, a few key concepts of gothic fiction were discussed. In this section the focus will shift towards some of the significant aspects of the Catholic faith and practice.

While the term "Catholicism" can be used to denote any of the Christian denominations, due to its definition being translated from Greek as "universal," usually Catholicism refers to the practice and following of the Roman Catholic Church, a denomination that found its origins in Western Europe ("Catholicism"). Furthermore, the *Dictionary of Philosophy of Religion* notes that Roman Catholicism focuses on the interconnection between the material and the spiritual; the created and divine. Thus, divine sacramental grace is not immediately conferred upon the practitioners of the Roman Catholic faith, but much rather it is achieved through the practice of the material sacraments and the worship of the saints and their relics. To aid the follower of the Roman Catholic Church in the practice of these sacraments, the Roman Catholic Church has appointed bishops and the Pope, as heirs to the apostles of Christ. The teachings of Roman Catholicism can be found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and are based on the doctrines of many theologians, but Augustine and Thomas of Aquinas in particular ("Roman Catholicism").

Additionally, it is essential to note the differences between Roman Catholicism and other denominations of Christianity, such as Protestantism, Eastern Orthodoxy and Anglicanism. The *Dictionary of Philosophy of Religion* notes that the main difference between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism lies within the aforementioned focus between the material and the divine; the Roman Catholic Church "[fosters] a sense of reliance upon the [Roman Catholic Church] and upon Christian tradition that is not often found in Protestantism" ("Roman Catholicism"). Moreover, the *Dictionary* also indicates that the most substantial difference between the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches is the history of both churches; the history of the Roman Catholic Church revolves around Rome – "Latin rather than Greek has traditionally been associated with Roman Catholicism […], Italian politics and art have shaped the papacy, and the circumstances of Western social history have influenced the structures, values, and expectations of the [Roman catholic Church]" ("Roman Catholicism") – while the Eastern Orthodox Church does not share this same history with Italy.

Since *Dorian Gray*, as mentioned before, is set mainly in London and Wilde himself was an Irishman, it is vital to note Anglicanism within this religious analysis. The Anglican Church, originally known as the Church of England, is a denomination of Christianity that features aspects of both Catholicism and Protestantism. Namely, instead of basing their doctrine on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, their doctrine bases itself on the *Thirty-Nine Articles*. Moreover, instead of recognizing the Pope as its nominal head, the Anglican Church views the Archbishop of Canterbury as its nominal head ("Anglicanism").

In the nineteenth century, Protestants in the United Kingdom began seeing the Catholic Church as a rival (O'Malley 72) and started seeing the Anglican Church as an intermediate step into Roman Catholicism (O'Malley 83). Moreover, they started criticizing the Roman Catholic Church and its institutions. For example, they felt as though the

confessional was tearing apart society. Namely, by confessing their sins in a confessional, the confessor would confide more of their private issues in the confessee than in their own spouse, therefore creating a division between the confessor and their spouse (O'Malley 73). Because of the seal of the confessional, this division could further be materialized. Specifically, because of the seal of the confessional, the confessor was not obliged to disclose the issues raised in the confessional, nor was the confessee (O'Malley 76). Furthermore, according to Catholic doctrine, all sins – even the most egregious ones – can be absolved. This further reified this division, since the spouse of the confessor might not have known the confessor well enough, seeing how the confessor might not have shared their sins to their spouse, because they had already done so in confessional.

Moreover, in the eyes of the Protestants in the United Kingdom, while confessionals were merely temporary perverse confinements, in monasteries, nunneries, and convents people were confined for longer amounts of time. People could be trapped and abused inside of these structures for multiple years. Henry Drummond further stressed this view by noting that he felt that convents were either prisons or brothels (O'Malley 79). An example of extortion on the behalf of the Catholics was a woman in 1851 who was forced to marry a catholic, join a nunnery or pay £80,000 (O'Malley 79). Instances like this one further instilled a sense of fear among British Protestants.

Originally Catholicism was merely seen as a relatively small threat to the young, Protestant, masculine men of England, because its influence was mainly on the mainland, while it was a minority religion in the United Kingdom. However, it was gaining momentum in the United Kingdom in the nineteenth century as well. This rise of Catholicism caused further distress for the Protestants in the United Kingdom because they felt as though the Catholics were seducing the people of the United Kingdom. Many critics of Catholicism, among whom Charles Kingsley, criticized Catholic priests for their femininity (O'Malley 86).

They felt as though the actual Protestant British man would be masculine, straightforward, and would not base his actions on his feelings, but rather on his rationality. Completely opposed to this view were the proponents of Catholicism, such as John Henry Newman. According to the Protestants, the Catholic proponents were using their feminine charm and seduction to lure the young men of Britain towards Catholicism. Because of this supposed seduction of young men and the feminine character traits of Catholicism, Catholicism was also often associated with homosexuality (O'Malley 96).

In this section, various key concepts of Catholicism were discussed, along with an exploration of how Catholicism was perceived in the Zeitgeist. These analyses will be crucial in understanding the significance of Wilde's interest in Catholicism when analyzing Wilde's personal life in chapter two.

1.3. Classic Gothic and Catholicism

In early gothic texts, explicit links between Catholicism and gothic fiction were made through the usage of a Catholic unsettling antagonist (O'Malley 94). The antagonist's devotion to the Catholic faith was not always explicitly stated, but was sometimes instead actualized through their job, choice of clothing and accessories, or through their being in a cathedral or a Catholic church.

An instance of an explicit Catholic antagonist is Radcliffe's 1797 novel *The Italian*. In the case of this novel, Father Schedoni is seen as a conniving antagonist who handles out of his own interest. His initial interest in accepting the Marchesa's offer is a mere hunger for power. Nicola's revelation of Schedoni's dark past shows that the latter's own lust and anger cause him to commit fratricide. Moreover, because of him being called Father Schedoni, we are informed he is a priest. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that "[i]n the Latin Church, celibacy is obligatory for bishops and priests" (*Catholic Church* 870). However,

when it is revealed Schedoni has married his brother's wife and allegedly impregnated her, this is in direct opposition to what the *Catechism* states. Moreover, while Nicola's revelation illustrates Schedoni's incriminating and sinister past, it also reveals Nicola breaking the seal of the confessional. He is later symbolically punished for this by Schedoni's poisoning of him. All these instances show Radcliffe's criticisms of the Catholic church and its clergy.

Another instance of an explicit Catholic antagonist is Lewis' 1796 novel *The Monk*. Here, the story is divided into two plotlines. The first follows Ambrosio and his vices, while the second centers around the romance between Agnes and Raymond. The first plotline, following Ambrosio, is filled with criticism of the clergy. For example, Ambrosio himself is a monk, yet his actions are hypocritical, lustful, and vengeful. He is seen breaking the seal of the confessional by turning in Agnes to the Prioress, after Agnes confessed her pregnancy to him in the confessional booth. Then he is seen being seduced by Matilda – who turns out to be a demon – into having sex with her, to which he obliges. Similarly to Father Schedoni, Ambrosio has broken the rules about celibacy the *Catechism* offers. After having sex with Matilda, he is now lusting after Antonia. Upon meeting Matilda again, Ambrosio is told that she uses magic, by which he is appalled. However, when she shows him Antonia taking a bath, he embraces the powers of magic. This appears to be a direct reference to the biblical king David watching Bathsheba bathe, even though she was married to Uriel, which "displeased the LORD" (*Authorised (King James) Version*, 2 Samuel 11:27). Moreover, sorcery is mentioned multiple times in the Bible as an "abomination unto the LORD" (Deuteronomy 18:10-12). After Ambrosio accepts the powers of magic, Matilda helps him rape Antonia through magic. Then, Ambrosio murders Elvira after she finds out what has happened. He even murders Antonia later on as well. Naturally, these murders are in direct conflict with the Ten Commandments of the Bible (Exodus 20:13). When he is captured by the inquisition for his crimes, he sells his soul to Lucifer in order to free himself. He is

liberated, but because Ambrosio has not stated his desire for anything other than his liberation in the deal, Lucifer is allowed to murder Ambrosio and take his soul. It is clearly visible how Ambrosio's plotline can be seen as a criticism of the hypocrisy of the clergy. While Agnes and Raymond's plotline is not so overtly anti-Catholic, it does still contain some criticisms of the Catholic church. For example, once the Baroness finds out her love interest Raymond is in love with her niece Agnes, she sends Agnes to a convent to become a nun. Moreover, Mother St. Ursula is responsible for framing the Prioress for the murder of Agnes, describing the murder in detail to the public, which, in its place, kills the Prioress. Both *The Monk* and *The Italian* utilize the topic of monasticism to criticize the Catholic Church. For example, both Agnes from *The Monk* and Ellena from *The Italian* are at one point punished for their actions and thus locked up in a convent. This critique seems to directly mirror the Protestant fear of being confined in a convent, as mentioned in section 1.2.

An interesting classic gothic text in which the criticism of the Catholic church is less prevalent is Walpole's foundational gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto*. Here, the friar Jerome is an example of a deuteragonist. Since he is a deuteragonist, him being a Catholic friar seems to be conflicting with the aforementioned gothic trope of the Catholic antagonist. However, for the second edition of the novel, a preface was written. In this preface, Walpole takes on the pseudonym William Marshal to address a few contemporary criticisms of the novel. He does so by pretending that the story was originally written in Italian by Onuphrio Muralto and printed in 1529 in Naples, and that the translator – William Marshal – is sharing his thoughts on the translator and the story itself. Marshal states how the author has leap of judgment when it is noted that the vices of the characters may be "diverted by devotion to St. Nicholas" (Walpole v), how the "principal incidents are such as were believed in the darkest ages of Christianity" (Walpole iii), and how "superstition" was "[in 1529] so forcibly attacked by the reformers" (Walpole iv). Moreover, he even likens the beliefs "in the darkest ages of

Christianity" to "barbarism" (Walpole iii). These comments strongly suggest Walpole's personal convictions and show his criticisms of the Catholic church.

This antagonization of the Catholic church in classic gothic fiction is quite significant, since – naturally – *TPDG* as a work of gothic fiction would be influenced by earlier iterations of gothic fiction. Moreover, it could further explain Wilde's personal views regarding Catholicism, since the antagonization of Catholicism was, as explained in section 1.2, also ingrained in British society in the nineteenth century in particular.

1.4. Late-Nineteenth-Century Gothic and Catholicism

In later gothic texts, the explicit links to Catholicism present in classic gothic fiction became implicit, if present at all. Misha Kayka notes how "a range of feminist and queer criticism has suggested that the Gothic must also be understood as a blurring of the boundaries between the masculine and the feminine" and how "the distinction between homo- and heterosexuality is shown in the Gothic to [have] the same blurred boundaries as those between the feminine and the masculine" (211). This becomes exceptionally clear in later gothic works, such as Stevenson's 1886 novella *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, or Stoker's 1897 novel *Dracula*. For example, in *Jekyll and Hyde* all the important acquaintances the titular characters have are with men and some of these male acquaintances of Mr. Hyde deem his actions "unspeakable", which Showalter argues is "the most Victorian code word [for homosexuality]" (Hurley 199), while Dracula "combines feminine with masculine sexual and emotional characteristics" (Kavka 211).

Moreover, both novels contain Catholic themes as well. For example, Stoker's *Dracula* takes the Protestant fear of the Catholic mainland of Europe and embodies it through a "[literal] infiltration of England by the Continent" (O'Malley 146). Moreover, the depiction of the Continent is filled with religious symbolism – from shrines to crucifixes and crosses.

On the other hand, the British character Jonathan Harker notes how he has been "taught to regard such things [as crucifixes] in some measure idolatrous" (Stoker 5). Furthermore, Richard Adelman analyzes *Jekyll and Hyde* for its connection to John Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice* (152). As will be elaborated on ulteriorly, Ruskin was an avid supporter of Protestantism. His *Stones of Venice* describes a vast difference between Northern Europe and Southern Europe. He notes how Northern Europe is "wild and wayward" (Adelman 152), which might appear to be carrying negative connotations. However, Ruskin also notes that these characteristics are "markers of human freedom, development and vitality" (Adelman 153). Furthermore, he also connects Northern Europe to the term "gothic" (Adelman 153). On the other hand, Southern Europe is described as "passive, mentally all but undeveloped, and therefore 'servile'" (Adelman 153). It is not a far stretch to view Ruskin's analysis of the Southern temperament as a direct attack on Catholicism, especially when considering his view opinion that any art form is a "fundamentally Protestant impulse" (O'Malley 64). O'Malley notes how Ruskin feels that

> [T]he pre-Reformation Catholic Church could produce art despite its corruption only because 'faithful Christians,' proto-Protestants, were still included within it. It is with the Reformation that the Catholic Church becomes wholly corrupt – and incapable of true art – simply because it is the remainder after the reanimators leave. (64)

Here, a distinction becomes visible between the "reanimators" and the "remainder," with the former actively protesting the corruption of the Church while the latter remains passive and allows the corruption to continue. Adelman, in turn, takes this analysis originally ascribed to architecture and applies it to literature, *Jekyll and Hyde* in particular. He notes how Hyde may represent a "broadening of consciousness, and an eruption of new freedoms denied to civilized man" (Adelman 161), implying the connection between Hyde and the Northern temperament. However, if Hyde represents the liberation and savageness of the Northern

temperament, Jekyll and the society Jekyll lives in represent the repression of these underlying liberated thoughts, as described in Ruskin's analysis of the Southern temperament.

As mentioned in section 1.2, Catholicism was often associated with femininity by Protestants – for example in Kingsley's critique of Newman. Therefore, Protestants would also often – sometimes mockingly – associate Catholics with (male) homosexuality as shown in the critiques uttered by Ruskin (O'Malley 34), Maturin (O'Malley 2) and Kingsley (O'Malley 86). Homosexuality is also a theme often associated with gothic fiction ("Queer Gothic"). Hogle notes the paradox that lives within gothic fiction on this topic; there is both a "threat[…] of" and a "longing[…] for gender-crossing [and] homosexuality or bisexuality" (12).

Another aspect that both Catholicism and gothic fiction share is their lenience towards excessiveness. One of the main differences between Catholicism and Protestantism is that the Protestants protested the Catholic tendency to create many rules; rules about the performance of their traditions, the specific attire their leaders had to wear, and the architectural structure of their churches, among others. The anti-Catholics were in favor of a humbler, more sober view on the Christian faith and accused the Catholics of straying on the paths of ritualism (O'Malley 74). Moreover, the sales of indulgences as a means to absolve oneself of one's sins was also condemned by Protestants such as Kingsley (O'Malley 82). However, gothic fiction also has a tendency towards focusing on the beauty of their stories, both in the way the story is literally written down, but also in the symbolism pertaining to the characters, the places they visit, and the objects surrounding them. As mentioned in section 1.1, their excessive ways of describing every aspect of the novel were often mocked by society. Moreover, from the early days there has even been a connection between Roman Catholicism, gothic fiction and excessiveness within the gothic works themselves. For example, *Melmoth the Wanderer* criticizes Catholicism for being "an excessive attachment to the physical world" (Leach 28). It

is true that gothic fiction usually punishes the excesses of the villain and might therefore be seen as a Protestant critique of a Catholic villain. However, this is in direct conflict with Ruskin's aforementioned view that the Northern temperament, as present in Protestant British society, represents liberty and wilderness, while the Southern temperament, as present in Catholic Southern European society, represents warmth, but passiveness and servitude. If this were true, Northern temperaments would embrace the excesses naturally present within people.

This chapter analyzed the interconnectedness between gothic fiction and Catholicism. While Catholicism was initially often on the receiving end of antagonization by gothic fiction, this relationship evolved over time, as clear through the paradox noted by Hogle. Within this paradox there lies both an interest in and a critique of the excesses of Catholicism. Moreover, this paradox could even be traced back to classic gothic fiction, since in spite of the antagonistic features the Catholics would be ascribed to in classic gothic fiction, their practices, symbols and settings would be described accurately, and in detail. In order to fully grasp the manner in which Catholicism is interjected into the gothic novel *Dorian Gray*, it is also necessary to dissect Oscar Wilde's personal affiliation with Catholicism and religion in general. Therefore, the next chapter will focus on Wilde and his personal views on Catholicism, but also the influences his acquaintances have had on his views.

2. Wilde's Relationship with Catholicism

In the latter half of the twentieth century there was a surge of literary theories surrounding the "death of the author," among which are notable theories by Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida (Walker 110). Cheryl Walker notes, however, that while one should be open to reconsider [their] understanding of "the author," it is also important not to totalize the idea of the author and diminish their own personal journey and the personality that has formed around this journey (111). Furthermore, Stein Haugom Olsen notes that there are two forms of biographical criticism, still very much alive today: 1) the biography "as a historical discipline," in which the focus lies on the greatness of the works of the author; and 2) the biography "as an instrument for literary criticism," in which biographical information is utilized to gain a better understanding of the contents of the works of the author. According to Olsen, only the latter form of biographical criticism is relevant to forms of literary criticism that seek to explicate primary texts (63). After assessing various key aspects of both Catholicism and gothic fiction, the focus will now shift towards several key facets of Wilde's personal life in order to establish Wilde's ongoing interest in Catholicism throughout his life, and where it originated.

According to Jan-Melissa Schramm, Wilde's "theology" was "compelling if simultaneously lacking in doctrinal consistency," meaning Wilde did not remain faithful to one doctrine but switched doctrines (253). Frank Harris, a friend of Wilde "for many years" (vi), acknowledges the fact that many, similarly to Schramm, assume Wilde suffered from doctrinal inconsistency (96). However, according to Harris, Wilde was a man of a singular personal conviction. Namely, Wilde's conviction was that "the extraordinary alone survives"; whether the extraordinary would be considered good or bad in the eyes of the world did not matter to him (Harris 97). In this thesis the focus is on his relations with Catholicism, so

naturally this chapter will also have its focus on his engagement with Catholicism throughout his life.

2.1. Early Connections to Catholicism

Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde was born 16 October 1854 as the middle child to William and Jane Wilde. William Wilde was a man of Protestant faith. He was the son of physician Thomas Wilde and Amalia Flynn. He was the only son not to become an Irish Protestant priest, but rather a physician, similarly to his father (Ellmann 10). William tried to ensure that both his sons would remain officially Protestant. In later years, when Wilde would become seriously interested in Catholicism, the fear of losing his father's inheritance would cause Wilde to remain Protestant for many years still (Ellmann 32). The sentiment Wilde feared was echoed by other Protestant relatives of Wilde. For example, before Wilde's half-brother Henry Wilson passed away, Henry made sure to include a subclause in his testament stating that Wilde would be excluded from the will if he were to have converted to Catholicism (Killeen 16).

William's wife Jane Wilde (née Elgee), like William, also came from Irish Protestant ancestry (Killeen 2). However, she would eventually turn away from her Protestant ancestry. Besides an interest in Roman Catholicism (Killeen 13), Jane also showed a tendency towards non-Protestant behavior – or non-religious behavior – for that matter. She once told a young man: "when you are as old as I, young man, you will know there is only one thing in the world worth living for, and that is sin" (Ellmann 13). Moreover, upon discovering the depth of the 1840s Famine, "she blamed the Protestant Ascendancy," of which she herself was a part (Killeen 5). This might indicate that her interest in Catholicism can even be attributed to rebellion against her heritage.

Wilde was christened in a Protestant ceremony on 26 April 1855 (Ellmann 16). His mother called him a "young pagan" upon his Protestant christening (Ellmann 16). Eventually, he would condemn conventional morality (Ellmann 32). Wilde would joke around with friends that he and his mother had "founded the society for suppressing virtue" (Ellmann 9). Both Wilde and his mother were unwilling to commit to a single doctrine. For example, both of them showed interest in Catholicism. However, his mother enjoyed "ceremonies in which she had no intention of participating herself" (Ellmann 19). Similarly, Wilde "delight[ed] in the forms of Catholicism, rather than its content" (Ellmann 32). In this respect, Lady Wilde and Oscar shared their disinterest in remaining faithful to a singular doctrine, as well as their disinterest in remaining faithful to the doctrine William supported.

Eventually, William's wife baptized both their sons as Catholic. When William was informed of the Catholic baptism of his sons, he has been quoted as saying: "I don't care what the boys are so long as they become as good as their mother" (Killeen 13-14). Despite expressing little concern here about the exact Christian denomination to which his children adhered, Wilde's father continued to adhere to his Protestant faith, and to expect his children to do likewise. William's stance on Catholicism would prove to be quite influential throughout Wilde's entire life. For example, during his college years Wilde would already be quite invested in Roman Catholicism. However, he would still call it the "Scarlet Woman" (Wilde *Complete Letters* 39). This term was a commonly used derogative sobriquet that Protestants had generally used to condemn Roman Catholicism, which they felt was seducing young men (O'Malley 131). The term was a reference to a Biblical figure called the Whore of Babylon, who was called the "MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH" (*Authorised (King James) Version*, Revelations 17:5). The dichotomy in Wilde's parents' religious beliefs would be an important factor throughout his life.

2.2. Adulthood

In adulthood, Wilde would continue to flirt with the idea of converting to Catholicism. Nevertheless, he would never completely adopt the Catholic faith until his deathbed. This does not imply, however, that throughout his life he did not come close to converting. In April of 1866, Wilde visited Reverend Sebastian Bowden, who later sent Wilde a letter implying that Wilde might have felt compelled to convert to Catholicism when they met earlier (Ellmann 90). As a result of this interaction, a conversion ritual was planned. However, Wilde himself did not show up, but sent a package filled with lilies instead (Ellmann 91). Lilies were often associated with Catholicism. For example, Amy King notes how in Richardson's *Clarissa: of the History of a Young Lady* lilies are used to symbolize the sacrifice of Christ (37). Moreover, Mandy Kirkby indicates the connection between the lily and the Madonna. Namely, from the Middle Ages onward, it was believed that when the "Apostles open[ed the Madonna's] tomb three days after her burial, [they found] it empty save for roses and lilies" (119). The fact that lilies were significantly linked to Catholicism might indicate Wilde's absence was certainly no firm refusal, but much rather a polite decline.

After his near conversion, his flirtation with Catholicism did not stop. However, over the years he found a way to merge Catholicism with Paganism (Killeen 36). His interest in both was depicted in the emblem on the title page of his collection *Poems*. This emblem included "a papal tiara above a Masonic rose, both enclosed in an egg-shaped oval along the sides of which is printed the rubric, '*Sub hoc signo vinces* [Under this sign thou shalt conquer]'". Ellmann remarks how the "tiara and the rose invoke […] two dispensations, Catholic and pagan, as well as their possible reconciliation in Freemasonry" (134).

Furthermore, in "San Miniato" (1881), Wilde describes the Church as the "holy house of God" (Wilde "San Miniato" 69). At first glance this reference could also be ascribed to the

Protestant church. But, upon looking at the third stanza, it becomes clear that the reference is to the Catholic Church:

> O crowned by God with thorns and pain!
>
> Mother of Christ! O mystic wife!
>
> My heart is weary of this life
>
> And over-sad to sing again. ("San Miniato" 69-70)

His love and respect for the Madonna, which is a key aspect within Catholicism, is clearly visible. Be that as it may, the love he felt for Catholicism had been diminished, which was clearly visible in the descriptions of Catholic institutions in his work. For example, in the same year as the aforementioned poem "San Miniato," Wilde also published "Humanitad." Here, the Pope is called "an old man who grabbled rusty keys" ("Humanitad" 91), and who is "alone with God and memories of sin" ("Humanitad" 93). The Catholic Church is depicted as a "murderous mother of red harlotries" ("Humanitad" 93). These quotations further establish the dichotomy present in Wilde's life, which he attributed to his parents (Ellmann 133).

Wilde was an aesthete at heart, with his initial influences being John Ruskin and Walter Pater (Ellmann 46). The former argued against a separation between art and morality and against the "notion that the study of beauty is the study of perception alone" (Landow 90). Pater, on the other hand, argued in favor of "see[ing] the object in itself it really is" (5). Moreover, he also stated how it is significant in aesthetic criticism to note the virtue present in the object, but to then "disengage" from it (Pater 6). Wilde himself also became an influential component of the aesthetic movement, becoming one of the most prominent figures in the art for art's sake – l'art pour l'art – movement (Adams 4). The views in this movement revolved around the vision that art should not be moralizing, but just be present for its beauty and therefore serve art's sake (Adams 5). These views again reimbursed Wilde's personal conviction that the "extraordinary alone survives." His love for the aesthetic further became

clear through his observations concerning his surroundings. For example, when he showed his interest in the "seductiveness of Roman [Catholic] rituals" (Ellmann 52), or when he was struck with the beauty of the Masonic costume for the Masonic lodge during his university days (Ellmann 39). In the former instance, Wilde applied his love for the aesthetic to the beauty of (the rituals of) the Catholic Church. Catholicism was becoming more intertwined with aestheticism during the Victorian era (Moran 233). However, the views that art should not be moralizing do contradict an aesthetic interpretation of Catholicism, since Catholicism is very morally charged, naturally.

On 3 January 1882, Wilde set out on a tour of cities around the United States (Friedman iii). In Lincoln, Nebraska, he met George Edward Woodberry (Wimberly 108). With Woodberry Wilde discussed topics such as religion, but also one of Wilde's inspirations concerning aestheticism: John Ruskin. About Ruskin, he told Woodberry, "[l]ike Christ he bears the sins of the world [and] like Pilate, wash[es] his hands of all responsibility" (Qtd. in Ellmann 192). This dichotomy of Wilde's depiction of Ruskin as being both Christ and Pilate could be indicative of his feelings towards Ruskin, who was an avid supporter of Evangelical Protestantism. On the other hand, it could also imply Wilde was guilty of superimposing his own conviction of "the extraordinary alone survives" onto his feelings towards and his view of Ruskin. Whether Ruskin was good or evil, Christ or Pilate, did not matter to Wilde.

This section illustrated the ambivalent nature of Wilde's interest in Catholicism in his early adult years. While he showed many signs of interest in Catholicism throughout his adulthood, he continued to be indecisive about acting on this interest in Catholicism and sometimes even criticized (the traditions and teaching of) the Catholic church.

2.3. Publishing and Reception of Dorian Gray

In July 1890, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (*TPDG*) was first published in an issue of *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*. After revisions to this original version, Ward, Lock and Company published the edited version of the novel in April 1891. The reviews were lackluster, calling the novel boring, self-serving and, most significantly, immoral (Ellmann 302). Wilde replied with letters to every single one of the critics writing negative reviews about the novel. He noted how he felt the characters were very enthralling, that he did not intend to receive as much backlash as he did – since he received enough publicity as it were – and that the novel was, on the contrary, quite moral in its message that no bad deed goes unpunished (Ellmann 303). The latter statement on morality is fascinating, since Wilde had noted in the preface to the novel that "there is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book" (Wilde *TPDG* 3). This paradox was further elaborated on by a review in *The Spectator* of the novel in October 1891, where the critic noted that the preface directly contradicted the message of the novel (602, 603). Kirby Farrell supports the sentiment in the review in *The Spectator*, stating how "[d]espite its sensational exploration of vice, *[TPDG]* pretends to be a thoroughly moral argument" (26). Moreover, Wilde's involvement with the art for art's sake movement would support the sentiment of the preface but would directly contradict the sentiments he expressed in his letters addressing the critics.

Critics have often assigned homosexual undertones to *TPDG*. For example, Jerusha McCormack notes how the novel details the "seduction [of Dorian] by Lord Henry Wotton" (222). Moreover, Joseph Carroll also affirms these "homosexual undertones", while stating that the novel illustrated Wilde's "feelings of guilt and shame regarding his sexuality" (Calangian 8). However, these homosexual undertones often did not go unnoticed to the nineteenth-century reader. As a matter of fact, Wilde was ordered by his publishing Ward, Lock & Company to rewrite his version of the novel originally found in the 1890 version of

Lippincott's Monthly Magazine. This revision was requested in order to remove or rewrite many of the passages that were considered to allude to homosexual tension between the main characters of the novel, before it could be published as a novel. Moreover, Killeen notes that McCormack has stated that the name Dorian Gray might be an allusion to John Gray (85). John Gray was a friend of Wilde's, whose relationship with Wilde might have potentially been sexual (Killeen 85). Moreover, Wilde and Gray both shared an interest in Catholicism, which caused Gray to convert to Catholicism in 1890 (Killeen 85).

This revision of the novel, the 1891 novel version, was ordered since homosexuality was considered improper at the time. Notably, it was viewed as a disease (Hilliard 198). On top of homosexuality being considered improper and a disease it was also a crime at the time, especially after the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 deemed sexual acts between two males "gross indecency" and punishable by law. The enactment of this particular act, and especially section 11, the Labouchere Amendment, was a reinforcement of and expansion on the laws present before that. It was used when actual sodomy could not be proven to sentence the individuals who were accused of gross indecency to hard labor. Before the Amendment individuals would be sentenced to life in prison for sodomy, but only if the sodomy could actually be proven (Calangian 2). Sexual acts between two men would remain a crime in the United Kingdom until the publishing of the Sexual Offences Bill in 1967.

Moreover, according to David Hilliard, there was sufficient reason to assume the protestant suspicions about the sexual orientations of the Catholics mentioned in the previous chapter were based on more than merely a stereotype. He notes that the aforementioned Labouchere Amendment, paired with a "growing social hostility," caused homosexual middle-class white men to create a subculture of their own in the late nineteenth century (183). He also notes that "[f]or many homosexual men in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Anglo-Catholicism provided a set of institutions and religious practices

through which they could express their sense of difference in an oblique and symbolical way" (184). Due to a literary movement in the late nineteenth century, in which literary men were accepting of and welcoming homosexual feelings as a different mode of experiencing the world, homosexuality was often associated with "the artistic temperament" (Hilliard 197-198). Among these literary men were Lord Alfred Douglas, Frederick Rolfe, John Francis Bloxam, André Raffalovich, and Wilde himself. These homosexual literary figures would also often consider themselves to be Catholic, further reinforcing the connection between Catholicism and homosexuality (Hilliard 197). The homosexual or Catholic identities of these literary men would often be ingrained into their stories.

O'Malley argues that homosexuality and Catholicism are also linked through their shared tendencies towards masochism (179). Male homosexuality in particular is often linked to masochism, for example in Case XVIII of the aforementioned study *Sexual Inversion*, the case of Symonds himself (O'Malley 180). However, O'Malley also states that "the spectacle of masochism [is also not] alien to the iconography of Catholicism" (O'Malley 179). Ellis Hanson even goes as far as saying that there is a connection between Catholicism and non-reproductive sexual intercourse because of both of their excessive natures. Non-reproductive sexual intercourse could be considered excessive, since it is not a necessity, but rather an instinct of lust, love, or pleasure (Hanson 250).

Because some of the aforementioned literary men would continue to have prolific careers in literature, they would find a way to introduce their sexual and religious identities into the homes of many British households, through the subtext of the works they produced. Moreover, while still being condemned in general, homosexuality would also see a rise in openly expressed support in the late nineteenth century. For example, the aforementioned Raffalovich published his study *Uranisme et Unisexualité* in 1896, which argued in favor of normalizing homosexuality (Hilliard 198). Furthermore, more notably, in 1897, the first

medical study on homosexuality in the English language was published, called *Sexual Inversion* by Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds. This study was a translation of their German study *Das Konträre Geschlechtsgefühl* which they published the previous year (O'Malley 180). When combining all the information given in this section, it has become clear that the publishing of *TPDG* was during a very turbulent time concerning the topic of homosexuality.

2.4. Alleged Relationship with Douglas and Court Proceedings

After the publication of *TPDG*, Wilde met Lord Alfred "Bosie" Douglas in 1891 (Grinstein 127), who turned out to be a prominent figure in Wilde's final years. The two of them, as per Wilde's account, began having an affair, though Douglas always denied the two of them having a sexual relationship (Ellmann 362). Rumors were aplenty of the alleged affair between Douglas and Wilde, to such an extent that even Douglas' father, the Marquess of Queensberry, found out about them (Ellmann 386). Due to the fact that Douglas' eldest brother Drumlanrig had committed suicide, in October 1894, in fear of a possible revelation of his homosexual relationship with Lord Rosebery, the Marquess was all the more committed to ensuring not another one of his sons would suffer the same fate (Ellmann 402). In order to do so, he continued to pester Wilde into ending his relations with Douglas (Grinstein 127), because he felt Wilde was the source of his son's corruption (Dowling 141). This pestering ultimately ended in Wilde suing Queensberry for criminal libel, on the request of and support from Douglas and Robert Ross (Grinstein 127). The Marquess was acquitted of all charges because of Wilde's withdrawal (Archer 74), but in his turn countersued Wilde for gross indecency and sodomy (Archer 75-76). Wilde was ultimately found guilty and sentenced to two years of hard labor (Archer 78).

During Wilde's years in prison, he became alienated from Douglas (Ellmann 462). Eventually, Douglas would write an article on his relations with Wilde, even exclaiming that their friendship was based on "love, real love – […] a purely physical admiration for beauty and grace, […] more spiritual than sensual, a truly Platonic love," which would contradict itself in multiple manners, since Douglas noted that their love was "physical" yet "more spiritual than sensual" and strictly "Platonic" (Ellmann 459). When Wilde learned about Douglas' article, he was extremely disappointed in the latter's intent of writing a self-serving article that would not benefit Wilde's process whatsoever and only exemplified Douglas' recklessness (Ellmann 460). Upon this discovery, Wilde further distanced himself from Douglas, which Douglas eventually caught on and perceived as termination of Wilde's love for Douglas (Ellmann 462). This conviction was further established when Wilde declined a visit from Douglas in prison. Douglas answered to Wilde's declension that he felt Wilde did not love him any longer, but traded his love for hatred towards Douglas, which Wilde refuted by stating that it would be better for them not to meet. (Ellmann 497).

What is more, as Farrell notes, "[p]rison represents the official will to strip the self of art in Dissanayake's larger anthropological sense, since it strips away all the cultural forms that support individual identity" (31). Here, he mentions Ellen Dissanayake's theory, as argued in *Homo Aestheticus* (1995), that art works as a means of creating value in one's life. Moreover, in prison, one is sentenced to uniformity. Everything, from clothing to food, is mass produced and not tailored to the individual. This deprivation of art, but more importantly individuality would most likely be brutal to Wilde. However, luckily for Wilde, he eventually received an outlet for his individuality.

In his final months in prison, Wilde was excused partially from his hard labor to write a letter to Douglas, which he would call "In Carcere et Vinculis" but would later be known as "De Profundis" (Ellmann 479). This letter detailed Wilde's account of his time with Douglas

and accused Douglas of shallowness and claim to fame through Wilde (Wilde "De Profundis" 1405, 1406), while later on in the letter stating that he felt no need for bitterness towards Douglas ("De Profundis" 1422). The second part of the letter is more spiritual and focuses on Wilde's statement that Christ shares many similarities to an artist ("De Profundis" 1433). The Marquess' condemnation of, followed by the state's prosecution of, Wilde's and Douglas' relationship illustrate how the society Wilde lived in at the time was not ready to accept Wilde's homosexuality.

The unfolding of Wilde's alleged relationship with Douglas and the legal reaction to its discovery illustrated how British society rejected the homosexual aspects of the relationship. This condemnation could have shown Wilde that his sexual identity would not be tolerated by this British society Wilde was, at that moment, part of.

2.5. The Final Years

After his release from prison, Wilde was elated and, while initially enjoying some light-hearted banter, turned the conversation into a political stance: "I look on all the different religions as colleges in a great university. Roman Catholicism is the greatest and most romantic of them" (Ellmann 495). This statement seems quite contrasting with earlier statements about the different religions, since here he seems resolute in his love and respect for Roman Catholicism. Moreover, he was convinced to "change his name to 'Sebastian Melmoth'" (Killeen 178). This pseudonym was significant in its meaning because it combined his "ultra-protestant past" with his "Catholic future" (Killeen 39). His "ultra-protestant past" is represented here through the last name Melmoth, which is a reference to the novel *Melmoth the Wanderer*. This novel is quite anti-Catholic in its themes, but it was written by Charles Maturin, who was related to Jane Wilde (Killeen 3). On the other hand, we see the first name Sebastian, which is a reference to Saint Sebastian, who has become a

"commonplace for homoerotic art" (Hanson 105). On top of that, Saint Sebastian is also a saint and is therefore directly linked to Catholicism and – as Killeen notes – in the Catholic sense also "an iconic figure" (3). Moreover, there is also significance in the fact that his pseudonym consists of the family name Melmoth and the given name Sebastian, signifying his own personal, homosexual, Catholic identity within the constructs of a Protestant lineage.

Wilde's interest in Catholicism would remain a constant factor throughout his life, but it would not be until his final month that Wilde would convert. On November 12, 1900, Wilde – who was by that time already quite ill – had a conversation with Robert Ross about his daughter Vyvyan exclaiming she was a Catholic towards her tutor (Ellmann 547). Wilde himself had previously stated that he felt that "Catholicism [was] the only religion to die in" (Ellmann 548). This statement appears to carry an ambiguous connotation. On the one hand, this statement shows Wilde's dedication to Catholicism, as he supports it as "the only religion to die in". On the other hand, this statement might also indicate Wilde's wish to convert to Catholicism is merely aesthetic. However, naturally, both can be true. Wilde could have been interested in the Catholic teachings, while also being interested in the aesthetics of conversion. Initially, Robert Ross only assumed the latter to be true. Therefore, Ross had denied Wilde's request for conversion earlier for feeling Wilde was not serious about it. However, he apparently changed his mind this time around and felt like Wilde was ready (Ellmann 548). He brought along a Catholic priest when he visited Wilde November 29, 1900 to convert Wilde into Catholicism (Grinstein 141). While Wilde was unable to speak on his deathbed, he did communicate by holding up his hand that he was consenting to Father Cuthbert Dunne entering the room and to Father Dunne performing a conversion on him (Ellmann 549). On the next day, 30 November 1900, Wilde passed away (Ellmann 549).

Noteworthy is the fact that on Wilde's tombstone a passage from the Book of Job was inscribed:

"Oscar Wilde

RIP Oct 16th 1854 – Nov 30th 1900

Job xxix Verbis meis addere nigil audebant et super illos

stillebat eloquium meum" (Ellmann 550)

This inscription is noteworthy because of the fact that the entire passage is written in Latin, which was a clear sign of support towards Catholicism; only in Catholic churches there would be read from the Latin Vulgate, whereas in Protestant churches this would have been switched out for a translation of the Bible in a local language. Moreover, the inscription is the Latin version of Job 29:22, which in English reads: "After my words they spake not again, and my speech dropped upon them." The story of Job tells of a righteous man, named Job, who is very beloved by the Lord, and because of his servitude to the Lord, he is very blessed. However, the devil challenges the Lord to a bet that Job is merely obedient because of the blessings he received from the Lord. Therefore, the Lord takes away all the blessings He has gifted Job in order to test his faith. This passage comes when Job recounts the story of his life to his friends, who condemn him for apparently having upset the Lord, otherwise Job would not have been on the receiving end of such apparent damnation. Job recalls how, before his damnation, people would gladly listen to his every word. Therefore, this passage could be symbolic for how Wilde was accepted and praised before his trials, but how he might have been viewed as a pariah afterwards.

After Wilde's death, Ross felt obliged to publish "De Profundis," initially excluding any allusion towards Wilde's and Douglas' relationship (Ellmann 551). However, upon discovering that Douglas was suing Arthur Ransome for libel – on the former's discovery that the latter insinuated vaguely the possibility of a relationship between Wilde and Douglas – Ross was inclined to read out the entire unabridged version of the letter in court, which Douglas did not even completely attend to, but rather left the courtroom early (Ellmann 552).

In response to the claims made in “De Profundis,” Douglas wrote two autobiographies called *Oscar Wilde and Myself* (1914) and *Autobiography* (1928). In both books, he denied any homosexual encounters between Wilde and himself (Ellmann 552). While he was initially quite aggressive in his statements on Wilde, also attacking Ross verbally and scripturally and even wrote that he had been “born into this world chiefly to be the instrument, whether I would or not, of exposing and smashing Wilde’s cult and the Wilde myth,” he eventually converted to Catholicism and softened his views on both Wilde and Ross, but he still would deny his homosexual relations with Wilde until his deathbed in 1945 (Ellmann 552).

Throughout this chapter, it has become clear that Wilde received condemnation for his sexuality from the father of his love interest, society in general, and, eventually, even from the love interest himself. Combined with his already growing interest in Catholicism, eventually he found a refuge in the Catholic faith. However, the relationships between the belief systems of his parents, between his own love for aestheticism and Catholicism, between his interest in Paganism and Catholicism and between his sexuality and his marriage illustrate how Wilde’s life was never black or white. Like his mother, he liked to experiment with various doctrines and theories, but would never want to commit unless he was forced to. The following chapter will analyze the novel and research the Catholic tropes present in it.

3. Vices, Penance and Atonement in *Dorian Gray*

After having illustrated some of the themes within Catholicism that run like a thread throughout Gothic literature and having assessed to what extent Catholicism and its key elements were incorporated within Oscar Wilde's personal life, the focus will now shift towards the novel itself, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (*TPDG)*. In doing so, one is instantly confronted with the decision which version to analyze in their analysis. Three different editions of the story exist: the 1890 publication in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, the 1891 novel publication by Ward, Lock & Company and the 2011 publication of the original typescript by Nicholas Frankel.

One could argue in favor of the 1891 Ward, Lock & Company edition of the story being the preferred source of analysis, as Lawler and Gillespie do (Beasley). This edition dimmed the emphasis on morality present in the original 1890 *Lippincott's* magazine version, which would further establish Wilde's own personal statement regarding morality in literature, presented in the preface of the 1891 version: "There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book" (Wilde, *TPDG* 3). What is more, Wilde himself has expressed his dislike for the popular press, because he felt that it was polluting art. Therefore, Wilde argued that the popular press caused "Public Opinion" to monopolize art ("The Critic as Artist" 2802). While this statement would likely be intended as a sneer towards the critics criticizing *TPDG*, it should be noted that *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, the magazine where *TPDG* was first published, was aimed at middle-class families. Therefore, it should also be seen as part of the popular press. Thus, because of Wilde's personal comments on the popular press and Lawler's and Gillespie's stance on the novel, as opposed to the magazine, one would be inclined to read the Ward, Lock & Company publication of the story as the main source of analysis as opposed to the typescript or the *Lippincott* version. However, as Beasley notes, the publishers at Ward, Lock & Company were fearful their publication would underdeliver

because of the low prices the *Lippincott's* were still being sold at and the popularity of the *Lippincott* version. Therefore, they ordered Wilde to rewrite the novel and add a few chapters as an incentive to purchase their edition instead of the *Lippincott* edition. While Wilde was more than happy to oblige and edit his story, these incentive chapters were absent in the first publication and were requested for monetary gain as opposed to artistic gain (Beasley). Moreover, although Wilde might have been eager to add to and change the story, this also shows that his intentions were also not entirely artistic but were also fueled by commercial tactics. Furthermore, Beasley notes that without the popularity – and to a certain degree notoriety – the *Lippincott* edition gained, the novel version (and the later printed typescript version) would perhaps not even have existed.

One could also argue the 2011 typescript version, as published by Nicholas Frankel, should be the source material for literary criticism of the story. Various critics had already expressed their preference for the typescript version before its major publication in 2011. For example, Brett Beasley notes how in 1976, John Espey felt that "the typescript represented Wilde's original intentions" and might therefore be essential in literary criticism on the story and should therefore be published (Beasley). While this is the first known version of the story, one should also note that it was merely a typescript. A typescript is not an official publication and, therefore, should not be eligible as the main source in literary criticism. Moreover, typescripts were more often than not written by typists and not the authors themselves, as was also the case for *TPDG*. The result of the typist copying the text the author provided usually resulted in one or sometimes two copies of the story which were not used for mass publication. Therefore, the typescript should also not be seen as an actual publication, but rather a stage in the process of the creation of *TPDG*.

Taking all of these statements regarding the three editions into account, it seems most appropriate to focus on the *Lippincott* version as the main object of analysis. However, since

Beasley notes that the typescript and the Ward, Lock & Company novel editions also contribute to the legacy of the story, the analysis in this chapter will also include a smaller number of comments concerning the Ward, Lock & Company and the typescript versions of the story.

3.1. Sin and Seduction in Dorian Gray

Throughout *TPDG*, various Catholic themes and tropes are explored. One of the more prominent ones is the theme of sin. In order for this analysis of *TPDG* to be successful, it is imperative to define what exactly constitutes sin, especially according to Wilde. As mentioned in the previous chapter, one of Wilde's most prominent religious influences during his years at Oxford was John Ruskin. Ruskin, at his turn, has expressed his appreciation for Saint Thomas Aquinas multiple times. For example, in *Mornings in Florence* (1875), Ruskin mentions a painting by Andrea di Bonaiuto called *Trionfo di Santo Tomasso e Allegoria delle Arti* (which is loosely translated as "The Triumph of Saint Thomas and the Allegory of the Arts") (64). This painting depicts Aquinas among, and especially at the center of, an amalgamation of various Catholic Saints and symbols (Eagle 328). When discussing di Bonaiuto's *Trionfo*, Ruskin was quoted as saying he felt the painting was "human art under heavenly guidance" (Eagle 330). Moreover, as mentioned in chapter one, Ruskin was not the only one influenced by Aquinas, as his work is seen as a great influence on Roman Catholicism as a whole.

Hence, the *Summa Theologica* by Aquinas was chosen as the source material for defining the terms used throughout this chapter. The *Summa Theologica* is a text by Aquinas, written from 1265 until 1274 and ultimately published in 1485, explaining and defining a multitude of Christian concepts and topics, in order to clarify these topics to theology students at the time. Aquinas recognizes the seven capital vices as being "vainglory," "gluttony,"

"lust," "covetousness," "sloth," "envy" and "anger" (Aquinas 1293). Furthermore, he states that "blasphemy" is the greatest sin (Aquinas 1638) and that it can be divided into "despair," "presumption," "impenitence," "obstinacy," "resisting the known truth" and "envy of our brother's spiritual good" (Aquinas 1641-1643). While there are certainly instances of gluttony, sloth, and envy in this novel, these particular vices are notably less prominently featured as the other vices in this novel. Therefore, the instances of vainglory, lust, covetousness, anger, and blasphemy in *TPDG* will be analyzed in this section.

3.1.1. Vainglory

Firstly, the analysis will shift towards vainglory, more commonly known as pride. Throughout the story, the characters themselves even denote they might be suffering from vainglory. For instance, Basil Hallward is afraid he might "devote himself to Dorian," but while he fears this might happen to him, he does not run from Dorian, which he fears "may have been pride" (*TPDG* 190). Similarly, Sibyl Vane feels that she is not worthy of Dorian's love, but while this could have been turned into humility, it gives her pride (*TPDG* 54). While multiple characters of the story show signs of vainglory, however, none of them are as overtly proud as the titular character himself. Moreover, while Basil and Sibyl might also be guilty of displaying prideful behavior, the difference between them and Dorian lies in the fact that they both acknowledge their pride, while Dorian does not assert his prideful actions throughout the novel.

Initially, Basil had considered Dorian to be pure and innocent, which becomes clear in his plea towards Lord Henry Wotton to not "spoil Dorian" (*TPDG* 196). However, upon his first meeting with Lord Henry – who Basil describes as "[having] a very bad influence over all his friends, with the exception of [himself]" (*TPDG* 198) – Dorian was "dimly conscious that entirely fresh impulses were at work within him, and they seemed to him to have come

really from himself" (*TPDG* 199). This elementary introduction to sin for Dorian is already quite telling on his pride, for he believes these impulses to be his own, while in fact they were instigated by Lord Henry's words.

However, Lord Henry's introduction to sin even carries a more subtle symbolic meaning, linking it directly to Catholicism. As Dorian is overcome with the entirely new sensations that Henry has instilled in him, a bee is entering a Tyrian convolvulus, otherwise known as bindweed. This scene carries significant sexual undertones, starting with the penetration of the flower by the bee. Furthermore, the inclusion of noting that the convolvulus is "stained" carries further sexual meanings, since, as Amy King notes, "what stains the corolla of a plant is pollen, or what Linnaeus called 'dust' and the 'male sperm'" (217). The inclusion of the staining of the flower denotes the male symbolism in the flower, further connecting the flower, symbolically, to Dorian. On top of the sexual connotations this instills, Gillespie notes that the scene shows more resemblance to the seduction of Eve in the garden of Eden because of the presence of the convolvulus, which is "native to Mediterranean limestone hills" (*TPDG* 23). Moreover, by specifying the origin of this particular convolvulus, namely Tyrian, this connotation to the seduction in Genesis is further imbued. Tyre in Lebanon has namely been noted as being one of the oldest towns in the world, having been founded approximately 2750 B.C. (Jidejian 12).

Throughout the novel, pride continues to be a recurring theme in Dorian's words and actions. For example, he continually blames his victims for his own actions. He does this initially with Sibyl, when he blames her for "killing his love" (*TPDG* 230). Furthermore, after having blamed Sibyl, he then continues to forgive his own sins by writing Sibyl a letter – while not posting it – and feeling forgiven after having finished it. This act of pride will also be further elaborated on later when discussing the act of blasphemy. Not only does he forgive himself through a letter, but he also claims her death to be a means to "atone" for the sins that

he feels she committed by having him watch her perform (*TPDG* 243). This shows that Dorian feels that he was entitled to her atonement for her sins. This is again very full of pride and will also be further elaborated on when discussing blasphemy. Moreover, even after being confronted with the fact that his cruel words have driven Sibyl to commit suicide he does not repent, but instead, again, blames Sibyl (*TPDG* 233).

However, Sibyl is not the only character to be victimized by Dorian's pride. When Basil requests to see the picture again, Dorian answers at first that he does not wish to show it to Basil (*TPDG* 248), but upon being confronted with and questioned about his actions – and his soul as it were – by Basil afterwards, Dorian responds with "madness of pride" in all his answers and his pride is what eventually leads to him showing the picture to a stunned Basil (*TPDG* 279-280). After seeing the picture and after Dorian's explanation of what happened, Basil rightfully so calls Dorian's wish a "prayer of pride" (*TPDG* 282) and urges Dorian to repent for his sins. Dorian in his turn then silences Basil – who was currently acting, symbolically, as Dorian's conscience – by murdering him. After murdering Basil, he continues to shift the blame towards Basil for provoking him. He goes as far as saying that he himself has suffered from Basil's remarks (*TPDG* 286). After wanting to dispose of Basil's body, he asks Alan Campbell to help him with the disposal. When Alan refuses initially, and even more upon discovering what Dorian needs his help for, it says Dorian feels pity for Alan (*TPDG* 291), which should sound like a virtue. However, he chooses not to act on the empathy he feels for Alan. Instead, he feels entitlement through the empathy he feels for himself. Therefore, he feels like Alan should help him, so he opts to blackmail Alan into helping him (*TPDG* 291).

Even after the deaths of Basil and Sibyl, Dorian's only concern is the "living death of his own soul," which is embodied by the portrait (*TPDG* 300). After all, earlier in the novel, Dorian considered the influence of his conscience on the painting a "desecration" (*TPDG*

243), implying that the picture was holy to begin with. Again, this will further be elaborated on when discussing blasphemy, but this is naturally also an instance of vanity and therefore pride, since it is extremely prideful to consider a portrait of oneself holy.

3.1.2. Lust

As the "Apostle of Aestheticism" (Adams 1), Wilde was quoted as saying "Aesthetics are higher than ethics. […] Ethics, like Natural Selection, make existence possible. Aesthetics, like Sexual Selection, make life lovely and wonderful, fill it with new forms, give it progress, and variety, and change" (Sumpter 631). According to Joseph Bristow, aestheticism can be defined as a "preoccupation […] with the necessity and urgency of celebrating beauty in the face of ugly and violent modernity" (555). Because of Wilde's aforementioned love for aestheticism, it should come as no surprise that a love for the aesthetic is also displayed on numerous occasions throughout the novel, especially in the 1891 novel edition. In that particular edition one of the main characters, Lord Henry, is even quoted as saying "I admit that I think that it is better to be beautiful than to be good" (*TPDG* 161). However, while Wilde argues in the aforementioned preface that "[i]t is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors" (*TPDG* 4), he also states that "[v]ice and virtue are to the artist materials for an art" (*TPDG* 3), thereby insinuating a paradox that the artist's life – and his or her sins and good deeds – is actually still in a way inspiring the story the artist writes. Therefore, it is not very surprising that because Wilde is a firm advocate of aestheticism, many of the characters in his novel also note beauty as a powerful asset. For example, even though Dorian does terrible deeds throughout the novel, when people in the story are confronted by rumors about his sins, they do not attest to them, because "[h]e had always the look of one who had kept himself unspotted from the world" (*TPDG* 260). Moreover, in Victorian times beauty was seen as a sign of virtue. For example, Mike Huggins lists appearance as one of the main

factors of addressing an individual's respectability during the Victorian era (177). Therefore, Dorian's beauty, his aesthetic value, is what frees him of any charges filed against him.

Furthermore, in his life, Dorian not only experiences his own feelings of lust, but he is also the object of other people's lustful feelings. Nearly everyone around Dorian worships his beauty and seems attracted to him physically. Moreover, Basil's worship of Dorian – which he even describes as "idolatry" – is "far more romantic than a man usually gives to a friend" (*TPDG* 250). His statements show that one could argue Basil had homosexual feelings towards Dorian. An elaboration on Basil's feelings for Dorian will follow in section 3.2. According to Aquinas, "the unnatural vice," as he calls homosexuality, is specified under the umbrella term lust. Naturally, our understanding of homosexuality has since developed, since – as mentioned in chapter two – even at the time of publication of *TPDG* homosexuality was viewed as a disease, let alone during the time of the *Summa Theologica*. More possible homosexual connotations can be found in the description of Dorian himself when he is described as having a "feminine" and "tender" nature (*TPDG* 247), which directly connects Dorian to the Catholic priests Charles Kingsley protested against (O'Malley 86). Furthermore, because of their femininity, Kingsley felt as though they were seducing the minds of young men in England (O'Malley 86). This is exactly what Dorian is described as doing, causing young men to "make themselves perfect by the worship of beauty" (*TPDG* 251). Moreover, Dorian likens Lord Henry Wotton to his love interest Sibyl Vane. He notes how both their voices "stir" him and "are two things that [he will] never forget" (*TPDG* 214). This confession feels like it would not be made if Dorian's feelings were strictly heterosexual.

However, as mentioned in the previous chapters, one of the main aspects that had to be rewritten for the 1891 Ward, Lock & Company edition, were the homosexual undertones, which had varying degrees of subtlety. For example, a quite blatant revision is Basil professing his love for Dorian. In the original typescript edition, Basil notes "I have

worshipped you with far more romance of feeling than a man should ever give to a friend" (Wilde, *The Uncensored Picture of Dorian Gray* 144), which is slightly changed, to "than a man usually gives to a friend" in the 1890 *Lippincott's* edition (*TPDG* 250). However, in the 1891 novel edition, the revision is far less subtle. Here, Basil states that Dorian's "personality [has] had the most extraordinary influence over [him]," noting only a remnant of the original feeling of the sentence, later on, when he does note that he has worshipped Dorian, but does not detail the degree to which this worship goes (*TPDG* 95).

A far more subtle revision between the three editions, for example, is the description of Lord Henry's wife, Victoria. In both the typescript and the *Lippincott's* edition, she is described as "leaving a faint odour of patchouli behind her" (*Uncensored* 90), a scent which – as Gillespie notes – was associated with prostitution (*TPDG* 210-211). By contrast, in the 1981 novel edition, her scent is changed to "frangipani" (*TPDG 42*), which Gillespie notes, is "a perfume derived from the Plumeria flower" (*TPDG 42*). Originally, Plumeria flowers were connected to "deities representing life force and fertility" and are therefore commonly linked to a "wide range of expressions of female sexuality" (Zumbroich 341). Later on, with the introduction of Christianity in Mesoamerica, where this flower originated, the connection with fertility caused this flower to be used for "worship of the Virgin Mary" (Zumbroich 341). The inclusion of the frangipani in the 1891 novel edition puts a far more positive focus on Victoria's sexuality than the patchouli. Moreover, the connection with prostitution that patchouli has, could further solidify the emptiness of the relationship of the Wottons. Prostitution is linked to lust and, paired with the blatant references to adultery that both of them make throughout the novel, indicates that a deep, meaningful, romantic relationship between the two might be less likely.

On top of the references made to homosexuality, numerous references were also made to heterosexual variations on lust, such as infidelity or promiscuity. For example, Lord Henry

Wotton and his wife make various remarks about their own infidelity throughout the novel. What is more, Henry goes as far as having multiple monologues about his dislike towards remaining faithful in a long-term relationship. Another example of infidelity is Lady Brandon's allusion towards the affair she might have had with Dorian's father. This can be seen as an allusion towards infidelity through her Freudian slip mentioning how she and Dorian's mother were "engaged to be married to the same man," immediately correcting this statement to being "married on the same day" (*TPDG* 191). Moreover, in the 1891 novel edition there was another instance of heterosexual promiscuity. There were two prominent characters added in the Ward, Lock & Company edition – namely, Sibyl Vane's mother and her brother James. In chapter five James asks his mother whether his parents were married, which she repudiates (*TPDG* 62). While presently the views towards an unmarried couple getting pregnant with two children might vary, in Victorian England, this would naturally be looked down upon.

Finally, multiple adulterers and profligates were mentioned in the enumeration of the influences of the protagonist of Henry's book that Dorian is reading, as well as when Dorian is recounting the stories of his ancestors. Examples of these include both of Dorian's ancestors named Lord Sherard, who had both led adulterous and promiscuous lives (*TPDG* 272-273), and Raoul's influences Gian Maria Visconti who had a "harlot who loved him," Pietro Riario, "whose beauty was equalled only by his debauchery," and Sigismondo Malatesta, who had a lover called Isotta (*TPDG* 274). In the original transcript, one of Raoul's influences, the Borgia, is even accused of incest, which was scrapped for the *Lippincott's* edition (*Uncensored* 177). These figures all expressed the vice of lust through their actions. However, it is quite significant that both of the Lords Sherard are Dorian's ancestors and thus directly influence him. Moreover, the other instances are influences of Raoul, who is the

protagonist of the book Dorian is reading. Therefore, because these figures influenced Raoul, they also influence Dorian and his actions indirectly.

3.1.3. Covetousness

While covetousness, now more commonly known as greed, does make its fair share of appearances throughout the novel, it is less prominently featured as the aforementioned vices vainglory or lust. And, surprisingly, the initial encounter with greed in *TPDG* comes from Basil Hallward. He states his reluctance to share Dorian's name with Lord Henry Wotton. When asked by Henry why he was hesitant to share the name, Basil states that he likes Dorian immensely and that he feels like giving up Dorian's name would feel like surrendering a part of Dorian, which he does not want to do, because he is greedy about Dorian's affection (*TPDG* 187). Moreover, when Dorian's soul – and Basil's affection for Dorian – has been immortalized in the painting, Basil once more illustrates his greed by not wanting the painting to be exhibited in a gallery, stating that he "[would] not bare [his] soul to [the public's] shallow, prying eyes" (*TPDG* 194).

Lord Henry also shows multiple signs of greed throughout the novel. He goes as far as stating his aversion towards charity, because according to him "[t]he aim of life is self-development" (*TPDG* 198). This aversion was further solidified in the newly written chapter three of the 1891 edition. Here, Henry notes how he does not pay his bills (*TPDG* 31), states how he feels "[p]hilanthropic people lose all sense of humanity" (*TPDG* 33), and even shows his greed for power when he notes that he wants to control and influence Dorian in the way that Dorian is controlling and influencing Basil (*TPDG* 35).

Moreover, in the original *Lippincott* Edition, Henry's immoral claims would gain him resistance from Basil. In the novel edition, however, a new character called Lord Fernor is introduced into the story. This new character, Lord Henry's uncle, seems to be the

embodiment of greed; he is said to be merely focused on benefiting the people he finds amusing (*TPDG* 29), complains that he feels like his cousin is merely visiting him for money (*TPDG* 31), adheres to Henry's claims about philanthropy, and even states his own dismissal of Aunt Agatha's constant requests for support for her charitable events (*TPDG* 33).

Throughout the novel, Dorian also commences exhibiting signs of greed. However, there are only a few instances in which Dorian's greed comes to the fore in the beginning of the story. This makes it seem as though Dorian is acquiring this particular sin through his friendships with Basil Hallward and Lord Henry Wotton. Dorian's greed becomes visible in the scene of conflict between Sibyl and Dorian. Here, Dorian expresses his disappointment in Sibyl's performance by tempting her with monetary gain and fame, attempting to incite her greed. Moreover, he further shows his own greed by saying that if Sibyl were to become famous, she would have belonged to him (*TPDG* 118). Afterwards, Dorian even states himself that his greed for experiences is directly rooted in his friendship with Henry, noting that "[Henry] filled [him] with a wild desire to know everything about life" (*TPDG* 211). This greed for experiences – but also for material goods and knowledge – continues throughout the novel. For example, once Dorian discovers the disadvantage of his deal with the portrait through the death of Sibyl Vane, he notes that his "own curiosity about life" had made the decision for him and now he could have everything in the world – the only problem was the portrait that would display his sins (*TPDG* 243). Here, by downplaying the fatality of his deal Dorian shows his greed for all the experiences, material goods and knowledge he can gain through his eternal life. He even states his love for material things – and the experiences they give him – to Basil, once Basil visits Dorian to condole him with the death of Sibyl, saying "I love beautiful things that one can touch and handle" after which he goes on to express his love for the "artistic temperament" they incite in him (*TPDG* 247). On top of that, Dorian's greed is expressed through the entirety of chapter nine, where Dorian goes from sensory

pleasure to sensory pleasure to escape his guilt caused by his conscience, seemingly caused by his obsession with the book he received from Henry. This obsession goes to such a degree that Dorian even purchases five copies of the book to be bound in varying colors, further solidifying his greed (*TPDG* 260).

3.1.4. Anger

Similarly to covetousness, anger – also known as wrath – appears in the novel less prominently than lust and vainglory. However, the instances of wrath that are present in the novel are quite indicative of the development of Dorian's corruption, since they show that his vices are at an advanced stage. According to the *International Handbook of Anger*, anger is usually triggered by feelings of "frustration; threats to autonomy, authority, or reputation; disrespect and insult; norm or rule violation; and a sense of injustice" (3). Three out of these five triggers are a direct result of a sense of pride, since the person experiencing the anger feels as though they are not receiving the proper treatment they deserve. Whether or not this pride is justified is not of concern here; it is pride, nonetheless. Only "frustration" and "norm or rule violation" are not specifically linked to pride, while they could very well still be linked.

Unlike the aforementioned vices, anger appears almost exclusively through Dorian's behavior in the *Lippincott's* edition. His initial encounter with anger is through his conflict with Sibyl over her performance. Here, he notes how she "killed his love" by performing this badly (*TPDG* 230). On the basis of this one performance, he informs her that his love for and interest in her will evaporate. The cruelty in his words ultimately shows in the painting, yet he thinks "it was the girl's fault, not his" (*TPDG* 233). It is visible here that he feels disrespected and insulted and that he feels an injustice has been done to him. However, this rage continues throughout the novel. For example, when Dorian is asking Mr. Ashton for help with the

transfer of the painting towards the attic, Dorian becomes enraged with Mr. Ashton once the latter asks whether he is allowed to see the painting (*TPDG* 257). Dorian even experiences violent fantasies of what he would do if Mr. Ashton were to have disobeyed Dorian's orders to not look at the painting, with the narrator stating that Dorian "felt ready to leap upon [Mr. Ashton] and fling him to the ground if he dared to lift the gorgeous hanging that concealed the secret of his life" (*TPDG* 257). Here, the anger Dorian feels for the fear of Mr. Ashton disobeying his orders is justified, since Mr. Ashton has been called by Dorian to perform a service and therefore is a (temporary) servant of Dorian's. Therefore, if Mr. Ashton were to disobey Dorian, he would be a threat to Dorian's authority and would be insulting Dorian. However, the degree to which Dorian's anger-filled fantasy goes is quite disproportionate for mere curiosity.

Upon being confronted with his actions by Basil, Dorian's anger and pride grow to such a degree that he even dares to show Basil the painting. Basil, in turn, is appalled by the painting and urges Dorian to confess his sins and pray for forgiveness, but eventually, Dorian's "uncontrollable feeling of hatred for Basil" causes him to murder Basil (*TPDG* 283). What is more, Dorian fails to feel remorse for Basil. After all, "Basil had painted the portrait that had marred his life. He could not forgive him that" (*TPDG* 300). Here, Dorian manipulates history by claiming it was the painting that had marred Dorian's life, while in fact, his actions did. His initial "prayer of […] pride" (*TPDG* 282), as Basil had called it, was the initial culprit, but on top of that, he had exercised multiple vices, while not being remorseful, not confessing these vices and not asking for forgiveness.

Ultimately, it is anger that leads to Dorian's death. Dorian deems it unjust for him to have to atone for his vices. He fails to take the responsibility for his actions, but instead keeps looking for loopholes. While Dorian may feel unjustly treated for having to confess his sins, some of the vices he has committed, such as murder, are even punishable by law. Therefore,

his feelings of injustice are not justified. To escape his punishments from both the state and his consciousness, he asks Alan Campbell to clean up the murder for him, with the latter even committing suicide. However, Dorian does not even respond to Lord Henry's mention of the suicide (*TPDG* 296). On top of that, even in his final hours, Dorian rebels against having to confess. In order to clear his conscience, he attempts to destroy the single piece of evidence against him – the painting. In doing so, his pride and anger appear to have gotten the best of him, since he is later found dead in front of the painting.

3.1.5. Blasphemy

As mentioned earlier, Aquinas classified blasphemy as the greatest sin. It is quite indicative of the vices of the characters that there is still a large number of times where the characters blaspheme against God. When categorizing the various instances of blasphemy into the aforementioned subcategories "despair," "presumption," "impenitence," "obstinacy," "resisting the known truth" and "envy of our brother's spiritual good" (Aquinas 1641-1643), it becomes clear that most instances of blasphemy fall into the category of resisting the known truth.

The most prominent critic of the Christian faith in the novel is naturally Lord Henry Wotton. His cynical views on Christianity and remarks that contradict the Christian faith pervade the entire novel. These criticisms even commenced in the first chapter when Henry criticizes the clergy of not thinking – therefore making the clergy beautiful, because according to him, knowledge mars one's beauty (*TPDG* 186). Further into the chapter, he notes that he feels "[c]onscience and cowardice are really the same thing" (*TPDG* 190). In the Bible, however, conscience is noted as being a system of "[one's] thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another" (*Authorised (King James) Version*, Romans 2:15). The Bible also says, "to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17).

Therefore, what Henry is saying here is that the system in place to inform us on the difference between good and evil is merely "cowardice," thereby mocking it. He continues this criticism of virtue upon his first encounter with Dorian when he notes how he feels that virtue suppresses one's natural instincts (*TPDG* 198). And, finally, in chapter four when he declares to Dorian that he "represent[s] to [Dorian] all the sins you never had the courage to commit" (*TPDG* 225), Henry further instills his initial sentiment that virtues, as caused by a conscience, are cowardly and uncourageous.

In the 1891 edition, Henry's blasphemy is even further elaborated upon. He states that mankind's original sin was its value of gravitas, as opposed to what the Bible says about original sin. In the apocryphal book Wisdom of Solomon this original sin is named: "by the envy of the devil death entered into the world" (*Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament,* Wis. 2:24). Furthermore, he notes that the senses could be able to "cure the soul" (*TPDG* 154), which contrasts the Bible as well. His understanding of the vices and the virtues is also not on a par with the Bible. For example, he notes how "ugliness is one of the seven deadly virtues" (*TPDG* 161), which contrasts Aquinas views on the virtues. As will be mentioned in the following section, the seven cardinal virtues, according to Aquinas are "humility," "temperance," "chastity," "charity," "diligence," "gratitude" and "patience" (1135). "Ugliness" is not one of them. Moreover, these virtues are not deadly according to the Bible and the *Summa Theologica*. Henry also notes how "ennui" is "the one sin for which there is no forgiveness" (*TPDG* 168), which contradicts our previous statement that blasphemy is the greatest sin.

Before examining Dorian's relation with blasphemy, one might be prompted to ask whether any other characters, besides Dorian and Henry, blaspheme against God. Surprisingly, one of the characters that might be accused of blasphemy is Basil Hallward. In the final conflict scene between Dorian and Basil, Basil cries out the Lord's name three times

(*TPDG* 282-283). This might be viewed as blasphemous, since the Third Commandment states that one should not take the Lord's name in vain (Exodus 20:7). Moreover, this view is reaffirmed in the Book of Leviticus. Leviticus 24:16 says "And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall be surely put to death". Leviticus 19:12 reiterates this sentiment, but mitigates it lightly, stating "And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD." In his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas does not mention using the Lord's name as profanity or in a blasphemous manner. However, he does mention the act of adjuration through the Lord's name. As an answer to the question whether this should be allowed, he answers that it is lawful to bind yourself to a promise using the Lord's name. Moreover, it is also lawful to bind a servant to a promise using the Lord's name. However, doing this to someone whom you do not possess any power over is unlawful. The only exception when this is allowed is if this promise is not mandatory for the person you are using this tactic on (Aquinas 2120). In the passage where Basil uses the Lord's name, it becomes quite clear that he wants to reform Dorian and that he wants Dorian to repent. However, while his pleas to Dorian appear quite urgent, he does not command Dorian to do so; he merely points out the importance of Dorian's repentance by focusing on the ugliness of the painting. Therefore, since he is using the Lord's name in order to reform Dorian, but does so without binding Dorian, it appears Basil is not using the Lord's name in vain. Therefore, Basil's actions in this scene are not blasphemous.

On the contrary, the same cannot be said for Dorian. Throughout the novel, his relationship with blasphemy blossoms. Initially, the instances of blasphemy are nearly all on account of Henry, but after the relationship between Dorian and Henry has deepened, Dorian's usage of blasphemy increases exponentially. Dorian's blasphemous utterances can be categorized as "impenitence," "obstinacy" and "resisting the known truth." Firstly, the shift will go towards the latter. His initial minor blasphemous utterances that resist the known

(Catholic) truth come when he talks about Sibyl to Henry – here, he notes how Sibyl is sacred. However, as the Bible notes, "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Therefore, because Sibyl has sinned, she cannot be sacred. Moreover, Dorian continues to view the painting as his own religion, noting how the painting would be "to him what holiness was to some, and conscience to others, and the fear of God to us all" (*TPDG* 236). On top of that, he writes Sibyl a letter asking her for forgiveness but feels as though he is forgiven after writing it, even though he has not even sent the letter (*TPDG* 237). Here, Dorian attempts to forgive his own sins, even though in the Catholic Church no mortal sin can be absolved without "God's mercy and a conversion of heart which is normally accomplished with the setting of the sacrament of reconciliation" (Catholic Church 454-455), nor can venial sin be absolved "[without] God's grace" (Catholic Church 456). When taking Aquinas' division of sin into either venial or mortal into account (1315), it appears no type of sin can be absolved without the aid of God – therefore falsifying Dorian's attempts to forgive his own sins. Once he realizes the concomitant of his wish, he even feels pain for the "desecration" the painting is to endure (*TPDG* 243), further reifying his worship of the painting. Finally, his resistance of the known truth culminates in the final conflict scene with Basil, where Dorian insinuates – much to Basil's dismay – that Basil will see his soul, even though Basil notes how only God can see a soul (*TPDG* 279), which he reiterates when he pressures Basil to reveal the painting (*TPDG* 280). Dorian's aforementioned view on the painting as a religion is further established in this scene when Dorian calls his request for eternal youth a "prayer" (*TPDG* 281).

However, Dorian's blasphemy not only comprises of "resisting the known truth," but also of "obstinacy" and "impenitence"; both are strongly present in the second half of the novel. These vices appear to be intertwined within Dorian, as visible in the various confrontations Dorian has with his conscience. These confrontations take on multiple forms;

they become visible through the reactions of characters like Sibyl Vane, Alan Campbell, and Basil Hallward, but also through the news of the deaths of all three of these characters, and – most prominently – through the painting. None of these confrontations produce their intended results and this is clear when analyzing Dorian's "obstinacy" and "impenitence." These vices first reveal themselves upon Dorian's initial encounter with the alteration of the picture. As a response to this, he questions: "Why had he been made like that? Why had such a soul been given to him?" (*TPDG* 233). Here, Dorian chooses to disregard his own realization a few lines back that the reason this was happening was because of his own "mad wish" (*TPDG* 233) and that he had not been made like that, but that his own greed and pride had made him like that. One chapter later, he reaffirms this failure of atonement when he states that "life had decided [to make a choice] for him" (*TPDG* 243). This failure of taking responsibility is mitigated by his adding "life, and his own infinite curiosity about life," but again reinstated when he alleviates the severity of the situation by stating how he is to have "[e]ternal youth, infinite passion, pleasures subtle and secret, wild joys and wilder sins" but that "[t]he portrait was to bear the burden of shame: that was all" (*TPDG* 243). Moreover, upon discovering the vileness of Henry's book, Dorian "never sought to free himself from it," even "[procuring] from Paris no less than five large-paper copies of the first edition" (*TPDG* 260). These examples illustrate how Dorian continues to blaspheme throughout the novel and does not seem to learn from his actions.

3.2. Virtues and Atonement in Dorian Gray

In the context of the novel's exploration of sin, in a Catholic context, it is also necessary to analyze the antithesis of the aforementioned vices. For example, are the characters in *TPDG* all completely vile and corrupted or is there a silver lining to be found here? According to Aquinas, the four cardinal virtues are "prudence," "temperance," "justice" and "fortitude"

(1134-1135). Through these four cardinal virtues, the virtues that are now commonly known as the capital virtues, namely “humility,” “temperance,” “chastity,” “charity,” “diligence,” “gratitude” and “patience” can be accessed (Aquinas 1135). These virtues are the opposite of the aforementioned seven capital vices “vainglory,” “gluttony,” “lust,” “covetousness,” “sloth,” “envy,” and “anger,” respectively. On top of these cardinal virtues, Aquinas also acknowledges “faith,” “hope” and “charity” as theological virtues (1142, 1656). It should come as no surprise that Ruskin also mentioned the four cardinal virtues and the three theological virtues in *Mornings in Florence* (Ruskin 64).

While these virtues are vastly underrepresented in comparison to the capital vices, there are instances of the virtues in *TPDG*, nonetheless. However, when analyzing the representation of the virtues throughout the novel, one thing becomes abundantly clear; most of the instances of the virtues are present due to Basil Hallward’s behavior. He constantly reproaches Henry for his questionable remarks, showing his faith. He is continuously warning Dorian to be aware of sins and the like, showing both his hope and faith. Even when Basil is facing his own vices, such as his “idolatry” of Dorian (*TPDG* 250), he does remain faithful, stating that this admission of idolatry is not a compliment, but much rather a confession to Dorian (*TPDG* 251). Moreover, even Dorian notices how the love Basil bore him was “not […] mere physical admiration of beauty”, but it “had something noble and intellectual in it” (*TPDG* 254). Dorian notes Basil’s virtuous nature, since he notes how “Basil would have helped him to resist Lord Henry’s influences, and the still more poisonous influences that came from his own temperament” (*TPDG* 254). Therefore, these instances show that Basil’s actions represent the possibility of a virtuous life for Dorian, especially as opposed to the sinful Lord Henry.

3.3. Confession in Dorian Gray

As Aquinas notes, the sacrament of Penance, or confession as it is currently widely known, is necessary to pardon someone's sins (3444-3445). This urgency for confession is what especially marks the difference between Catholicism and Protestantism. Becker and Woessmann note that for Catholics the sin of suicide is much more fatal than for Protestants; the Catholics will not be able to confess the sin they have committed, since they have died as a result of it (Qtd. in Torgler and Schaltegger 317). Therefore, within a Catholic frame of reference, if Dorian had wished to be absolved of his sins, he needed to confront them and accept them as his own mistakes. Yet, he does not do so accordingly in the novel and that is what ultimately causes his demise, after receiving multiple chances of redeeming his sins.

There are multiple instances of situations where Dorian does try to confess his sins. He writes Sibyl a letter explaining his love for her and asking her for forgiveness (*TPDG* 237). The problem with this situation is Dorian's assumption that his writing of the letter has gifted him redemption for the sins he has committed against Sibyl. However, he has not confessed his sins to anyone besides himself and, inadvertently, to the painting. Similarly, when he attempts to confess his sins to Basil, he does not do so verbally. Instead, he opts to show Basil the painting. When the painting visualizes Dorian's sins to Basil and Basil attempts to convince Dorian to confess his sins and pray, Dorian instead responds with anger and – as we have learned earlier in this chapter – murders Basil (*TPDG* 281-283). Once more, Dorian has been unable to verbalize a confession, which he apparently does desperately want to do. Finally, when he tells Alan of the death of Basil, Dorian initially deems it a suicide. Once Alan continues to refuse aiding Dorian, Dorian confesses it was a murder. However, he still rejects the responsibility for the murder, stating that Basil had ruined Dorian's life (*TPDG* 290). Therefore, Dorian fails to confess his sins a third time.

An analysis of this need for confessional in the novel connecting to Wilde's personal life could be that this urge to confess symbolizes Wilde's need for confessing his homosexuality liberally. As mentioned in the chapter two, Wilde felt he could sue the Marquess of Queensberry for his pestering, even though homosexuality was illegal and punishable by law. This proactive behavior shows Wilde either did not care about the fact that he could potentially be perceived as homosexual or that he did not think, but much rather let his emotions take the upper hand. However, either way, he did continue his lawsuit until he lost it, which seems to support the former stance.

Dorian's inability to confess his sins could be attributed to his blasphemy, as done in section 3.1.5. However, when analyzing Dorian's sins as being symbolic for his homosexuality, this inability and unwillingness could also have to do with him feeling he has done nothing wrong and has committed no sin. In this light, this novel turns from a gothic novel into a tragedy, with Dorian's inaptitude to conform to society's heteronormative standards – ultimately leading to his suicide.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, it has become clear how paradoxical Wilde's life was. Wilde's Protestant upbringing and heritage opposed to his interest in Catholicism, Wilde's homosexual relations opposed to his heterosexual marriage, Wilde's interest in and eventual turn towards Catholicism opposed to the liberation of his aestheticism. Even Wilde himself was aware of the paradoxical division within him and, as Ellmann notes, attributed this division to his parents (133).

The influence of Wilde's parents on his personal life and his personal convictions was quite significant. His mother's liberated spirit would cause Wilde to find a manner to merge aestheticism, Catholicism, and even Paganism (Killeen 36). However, his father's Protestantism would guide Wilde's actions throughout most of his life. For example, his father's inheritance would influence Wilde's decision not to convert to Catholicism earlier than he did (Ellmann 32). The paradoxical nature of his parents' marriage would also pervade throughout *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (*TPDG*). Most importantly, the moral message of the book and its conviction of sin as opposed to Wilde's view presented in the preface. Dorian is constantly convicted for his sins and eventually faces his fate because of it. However, throughout the novel, a desire to confess all his sins does seem to come from within Dorian. Rather than being a conviction of Dorian for his blasphemy, pride, lust, greed, and anger, the novel appears to turn into a tragedy with its protagonist not being able to live his true life. The mixture of his father's Protestant conviction of sin as opposed to his mother's liberation and even delight in sin (Ellmann 13) is clearly represented in the conflicting message of the novel.

The tragedy of the novel would eventually foretell Wilde's personal life.

Five years after the publication of *TPDG*, the novel's author was convicted by the father of his lover, society, and even eventually by the lover himself, for being who he was. He was imprisoned and deprived of his individuality because of this conviction.

It has become clear that within this novel, the gothic aspect – the uncanny – is the fear of being completely liberated, free from any constraints of society. This idea of actually being completely liberated would probably be terrifying to Wilde himself, which is why the influence of his Protestant upbringing turns this gothic tale into a tragedy. Fortunately, Wilde would eventually feel liberated enough to break free from his father's constraints and convert to Catholicism, which had always been of interest to him.

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