Deviating from the Norm: A Queer Theory Analysis of The Picture of Dorian Gray

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Introduction

Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* can be read as a cautionary tale against decadence and depravity. But in a queer reading, Dorian Gray's relationships with male characters can be understood in terms of same sex attraction, offering a cautionary tale that exemplifies the consequences of outing oneself as a homosexual individual in a traditional society. Or, to put it another way, the novel shows how Dorian is a victim of a heteronormative society. Homosexual identity emerges throughout the novel in key ways, as seen through Basil's idolatrous worship of Dorian and the robust ties of male bonding. Due to his privileged standing, Dorian is able to explore same-sex relationships with members from the upper and lower rungs of society. This paper offers a queer interpretation of the novel by analyzing coded language, applying René Girard's theory of desire to relationships, and investigating Wilde's fixation on the proletariat class.

Queer scholarship and studies in LGBT history offer a framework for considering gay identity in the novel. Eve Sedgwick's *Between Men* was instrumental in interpreting male relationships, particularly her concepts of male homosocial bonding and the erotic triangle. The paper also cites Jeffrey Weeks' work, which draws into question who is categorized as a homosexual individual, as one may participate in sexual acts with members of the same sex and not identify as gay (100, 114). Rather than fetishizing or forcing individuals to conform to a sexual orientation, self-identification is a crucial aspect when beginning to understand the nuances of sexuality. While homosexuality "cannot be reduced to one particular form or pattern" (Weeks 100), theorists have laid down groundwork and indicators to look for when identifying queer activity at work in a text. Ideally, the aim of this essay is to provide supplementary evidence as to how queer identity is represented in *Dorian Gray*. Since classics have been traditionally subjected to a heterosexual reading, the erasure of gay presences is detrimental, implying heterosexuality as the hegemonic—and perhaps the only appropriate—orientation to have (Summers xvii).

Coded Language in Dorian Gray

Coded language in *Dorian Gray* often takes the form of peculiar diction and allusions to Greek mythology, history, and culture. When queering *Dorian Gray*, I define code words as those that have a sexual and homoerotic effect or indicate something other than what a heterosexual account could explain. Although coded language deliberately conceals the implication, inferences can contextualize queer identities at work throughout the novel.

For example, attraction is evident when Basil describes how Dorian's influence affects his art. Yet Basil downplays his feelings as "curious artistic idolatry" (Wilde 13), despite his devotion being infatuation. The words "personality" and "influence" indicate Basil's idolatrous worship because the peculiar usage of these words implies same-sex attraction. This is notable when Basil tells Lord Henry that "As long as I live, the personality of Dorian Gray will dominate me" (14). Basil also asserts that Dorian's "personality had been the great turning-point in his art" (114), and "his personality has suggested to me an entirely new manner in art, an entirely new mode of style. I see things differently, I think of them differently… [as if] some subtle influence passed from him to me'" (12). Dorian's "personality" and "influence" evidently dominate Basil's art and his perception. Joseph Bristow notes how "'Personality' – a word repeatedly turned to by Wilde throughout the trials – both eludes and yet signals the object of homosexual attraction" (55). "Personality" and "influence" imply same-sex attraction between the characters, suggesting an exhilarating, but forbidden relationship between Basil and Dorian. As Dennis Allen notes, "the relations of the novel's three main characters are based on a rather curious idea

of 'influence'" (119), which may suggest that the peculiar way Basil describes Dorian implies desire. When Basil recalls his first meeting with Dorian to Lord Henry, he explains solemnly:

> A curious sensation of terror came over me. I knew that I had come face to face with someone whose mere personality was so fascinating that, if I allowed it to do so, it would absorb my whole nature, my whole soul, my very art itself. I did not want any external influence in my life. You know yourself, Harry, how independent I am by nature. I have always been my own master; had at least always been so, till I met Dorian Gray. (Wilde 8)

Basil's first encounter with Dorian evokes a sexual revelation, symbolizing Basil's outing and self-identification of his own sexuality. "Influence" and "personality" signify Basil's yearning for Dorian, but for every confession wrestled from Basil, either from Lord Henry or Dorian, Basil's feelings are trivialized or pitied. However, Basil reiterates how Dorian's influence has an extraordinary effect on his work, leading to the prominent confession at the end of chapter nine, in which Basil confesses:

> Your personality had the most extraordinary influence over me. I was dominated, soul, brain, and power by you. You became to me the visible incarnation of that unseen ideal whose memory haunts us artists like an exquisite dream. I worshipped you. I grew jealous of everyone to whom you spoke. I wanted to have you all to myself. I was only happy when I was with you. When you were away from me you were still present in my art…Of course, I never let you know anything about this. It would have been impossible. You would not have understood it; I hardly understood it myself…Weeks and weeks went on, and I grew more and more absorbed in you. (117)

Basil's declarations are solemn; he reveals his feelings multiple times, restating himself until they become clear. Moments of confession and "identification in the text tend to occur twice; just as Dorian 'realizes' himself when he hears Lord Henry's words and again when he views the portrait; the painting leads Basil to confess, first to Lord Henry, and then to Dorian" (Ohi 109-110). Yet, one announcement of attraction is not enough, since the characters assert their feelings multiple times. Since Dorian dismisses Basil as having "a very disappointing confession," Basil downplays his feelings and responds with, "'Why, what did you expect, Dorian?'" (Wilde 119). Dorian muses how Basil's declaration explains "the painter's absurd fits of jealously, his wild devotion, his extravagant panegyrics, his curious reticences—he understood them all now, and he felt sorry" (120). Even when Dorian dismisses Basil's feelings, Basil clings to the comfort of Dorian as his companion and muse. Desire is understood through coded language because Basil voices his attraction in a subtle, but suggestive manner.

Furthermore, Greek references serve as prominent code words throughout *Dorian Gray*, perhaps because ancient Greek society was more accepting of homosexuality. Names such as "Narcissus" and "Adonis" are used to describe Dorian (Wilde 5, 109, 118), along with Greek references such as "ivory Hermes" or "silver Faun" (28). Thomas Heacox notes how Greek allusions made during the Victorian age discretely referred to homosexual love because:

> reference to things Greek, then—to literature and culture and myth and historical characters and places—constitute, in a homosexual context, a prolix expansion of one unspoken word. Names and places vibrate and resonate with meaning, but all come to rest on a single theme; all such words mean the same word, the only word that dare not speak its name. (58)

Moreover, when examining Greek allusions, the context of certain names—Narcissus and Adonis—resonates with a homoerotic quality. When Basil tells Lord Henry how he placed too much of himself in Dorian's portrait, Lord Henry exclaims, "'Too much of yourself in it! Upon my word, Basil, I didn't know you were so vain; and I really can't see any resemblance between you, with your rugged, strong face and your coal-black hair, and this young Adonis, who looks as if he was made of ivory and rose-leaves. Why, my dear Basil, he is a Narcissus'" (Wilde 5). Lord Henry depicts Dorian with a Hellenic quality of "ivory and rose-leaves," and compares Dorian to beautiful youths. By romanticizing Dorian through a comparison to Greek figures, he becomes an embodiment for forbidden desire.

Wilde uses Greek references to represent homosexuality without being overly explicit in his writing. Even Lord Henry muses how "'the world

would gain such a fresh impulse of joy… [if we] return to the Hellenic ideal…But the bravest man among us is afraid of himself'" (20). Lord Henry, who has a penchant for dispensing unorthodox thoughts, paradoxical statements, and philosophy, vocalizes what other characters are afraid of pursuing. In this way, Lord Henry's character allows Wilde to criticize the society he lives in and make Lord Henry a proponent of homosexuality. As Nils Clausson notes, "Lord Henry's philosophy of unfettered self-development can be read as an implicit recommendation to homosexuals to realize their true being, despite the misguided restraints of society and religion" (347). Lord Henry encourages Dorian and others to pursue what they are afraid of because "the aim of life is self-development. To realize one's nature perfectly—that is what each of us is here for. People are afraid of themselves nowadays. They have forgotten the highest of all duties, the duty that one owes to one's self'" (20). Lord Henry's philosophy is to experiment, understand, and better oneself because strictly adhering to society's whims will mar one's happiness. This philosophy is especially applicable to individuals who are questioning their sexuality.

In addition to coded language, the portrayal of music in the novel is also associated with homosexuality. Every time music is associated with Lord Henry, it heralds desire and adds a homoerotic quality to each scene. While Dorian, Alan Campbell, and Lady Henry share an affinity for music, only Lady Henry admits to being afraid of good music. She states how it "it makes me too romantic. I have simply worshipped pianists…I don't know what it is about them. Perhaps they are foreigners" (Wilde 49). Lady Henry confesses that music dominates her senses and makes her afraid of losing her bearings, while Lord Henry muses, "nothing can cure the soul but the senses, just as nothing can cure the senses but the soul" (23). In this context, he provides a connection between the senses and soul. If one deprives the senses from the soul, or the soul from the senses, both will stagnate. Clausson states:

> Lord Henry articulates here an early theory of the evils of repression. For it is the *repression* of the same-sex sexuality, and not the sexual acts themselves, that poisons and mutilates the mind and the soul. Consequently, liberation from that repression is seen as necessary for the full development of the individual personality. (348)

By repressing one's sexuality, the individual mars his own happiness by never truly "outing" himself. If the gay male chooses to live his life in secrecy, he will never develop as his own individual. Instead, he will only perpetuate the view of homosexuality as a malady.

Furthermore, music is used as a form of coded language in Dorian and Alan Campbell's relationship. Campbell "was an excellent musician" and "played both the violin and piano better than most amateurs; in fact, it was music that had first brought him and Dorian Gray together—music and that indefinable attraction that Dorian seemed to be able to exercise whenever he wished" (Wilde 170). However, while music attracted them to each other, it became a deterrent to Campbell. Their intimacy lasted "for eighteen months" and both would always be "seen together at the Opera, and wherever good music was going on" (170). Then Campbell "appeared almost to dislike hearing music, and would never himself play, giving as his excuse, when he was called upon, that he was so absorbed in science that he had no time left in which to practice" (170). "Music" is a substitute word for Campbell's desires. By rejecting music, he ultimately denies his attraction to Dorian. Campbell willfully represses and rejects his gay identity, thus destroying his "individual personality" as noted by Clausson. Campbell proceeded to keep his distance from Dorian and, "Whether or not a quarrel had taken place between them no one ever knew. But suddenly people remarked that they scarcely spoke when they met, and that Campbell seemed always to go away early from any part at which Dorian Gray was present" (Wilde 170). Again, Campbell suffers from what Clausson calls "the evils of repression," thus straining his relationship with Dorian.

Lord Henry is often described as possessing music-like qualities, making him an important character for analyzing homoerotic subtext. Such is evident when he speaks to Dorian for the first time. Lord Henry is described with hands of a "curious charm" and his voice was "like music, and seemed to have a language of their own" (Wilde 23). This "language" Lord Henry speaks of is a coded language. Since Lord Henry speaks with "musical words said with musical utterance" (61), he compares

his influence over Dorian akin to "playing upon an exquisite violin. He [Dorian] answered to every touch and thrill of the bow" (39), and in return, Lord Henry wanted Dorian "to play to me" on his violin instead (43). When Lord Henry theorizes how "pleasure is the only thing worth having," he is described with having a "slow, melodious voice" when he speaks (82). The most notable usage of music occurs when Lord Henry and Dorian are together, moving conveniently to a music room (218), where Dorian plays Lord Henry a nocturne (221). As Dorian plays the piano, Lord Henry confesses to him:

> You are really wonderful, Dorian. You have never looked more charming than you do tonight. You remind me of the day I saw you first. You were rather cheeky, very shy, and absolutely extraordinary. You have changed, of course, but not in appearance…There are moments when the odor of *lilas blancs* passes suddenly across me, and I have to live the strangest month of my life over again. I wish I could change places with you, Dorian…You are the type of what the age is searching for, and what it is afraid it has found. I am so glad you have never done anything—never carved a statue, or painted a picture, or produced anything outside of yourself! You have set yourself to music. Your days are your sonnets. (221-223)

With evening as a backdrop, the atmosphere is ripe with romantic undertones, especially when Lord Henry and Dorian move to the music room after dinner. After noting that "it has been a charming evening, and we must end it charmingly," Lord Henry says that he wants to introduce Dorian to someone new. Dorian declines, and Lord Henry asks Dorian to stay the night since he has never heard Dorian play "so well as tonight. There was something in your touch that was wonderful. It had more expression than I had ever heard from it before" (223). Through a queer analysis, Lord Henry's attraction to Dorian is apparent. He wants Dorian to stay the night but when Dorian declines, Lord Henry finds himself, like Campbell, conflicted.

Throughout the novel, code words are prevalent throughout the text, suggesting same-sex attraction through confessions, music, and Greek references. In addition to code words, homosexual identity can also be explored through René Girard's theory of desire. The next section uses Girard's theory to analyze how characters fall into a pattern of triangular rivalry.

Triangle of Desire in Dorian Gray

Triangular, or mimetic desire, as René Girard proposes, "is not based on the spontaneity of the subject's desire, but rather the desires that surround the subject. He argues that humans do not themselves know what to desire; as a result, they imitate the desires of others" (Palaver 35). Girard's theory suggests that desire is borrowed from another individual, spreading from person to person. Since envy arises when an individual wants to possess what someone else has (such as an object, success, wealth, or a relationship), a rivalry may develop, and competition will increase subject desirability. Since rivalry stems from imitated desires, both contenders only want to possess "the desires that surround the subject" (Palaver 35). The desired subject becomes an attractive accessory to the individual by asserting status, possession, or value. This mode of thinking perpetuates the cycle of desire.

When applying Girard's theory to Basil, Dorian, and Lord Henry, there is a strong emphasis on the trio's dynamic in the opening chapters. Basil and Lord Henry compete for Dorian's attention and both want to possess his affections, creating tension. It is only after Basil explains how Dorian influences his art that Lord Henry becomes interested in Dorian. If Basil kept his interest hidden, Lord Henry would have dismissed Basil's painting as merely another commission. Instead, Basil tells Lord Henry of his encounter with Dorian, gaining Lord Henry's attention. Lord Henry later successfully monopolizes Dorian's attention, much to Basil's chagrin. Both men compete for Dorian's affection, forming Girard's triangle.

Later in the novel, Basil and Lord Henry want Dorian's portrait, making Dorian feel displaced because his identity is embodied within the portrait, rather than himself (Bristow 56). Lord Henry jests, "I wish you chaps would not squabble over the picture. You had much better let me have it, Basil. This silly boy doesn't really want it, and I really do," but Dorian exclaims, "If you let anyone have it but me, Basil, I shall never forgive you!" (Wilde 30). Lord Henry wants to possess Dorian's portrait, but Basil reassures Dorian that Dorian himself owns the portrait and no one else can have it. Later, Lord Henry suggests

attending a play together. Basil declines, saying he is busy and would prefer to "'stay with the real Dorian'" (31), the one in the portrait. Basil refers to the portrait as the "real Dorian" because the artist believes the portrait represents Dorian's innocent nature before Lord Henry's corruption. In the end, Dorian symbolically stabs the painting—himself—and merges back into a single entity. Rather than Dorian feeling threatened by his split identity, it could be that he wants to be the object of desire. By becoming the "status of the object" and "choosing to be desired by the other [the gazer], Dorian makes his wish to be eternally young and beautiful" (Allen 119). Dorian wishes to possess the gaze of others and visually dominate them. Once he is cognizant of his beauty, Dorian trades his soul in exchange for being an object of aesthetic appeal to others.

It is important here to emphasize how the "triangular relationship of Basil, Dorian, and Lord Henry makes sense only in homosexual terms" (Sedgwick 176). Basil worships Dorian to the extent that the idolatry is clearly romantic; Dorian's exceptional beauty and influence snare men and women alike. Even Lord Henry cannot escape his attraction to Dorian. Lord Henry's "oblique confession of seduction" makes Dorian question and come to terms with his sexual identity (Ohi 110). The trio's relationship makes the most sense in a homosexual context because it would be difficult to provide a heterosexual account as to why Basil is fixated on Dorian, or why Lord Henry attributes Greek figures to Dorian, if Greek allusions act as code for homosexuality. It seems plausible to accept the idea of Basil having feelings for Dorian, as Dorian later realized Basil was incredibly fond of him, noting "the love that he bore him—for it was really love—had nothing in it that was not noble and intellectual" (Wilde 122). Dorian acknowledges Basil's feelings, which exist between a spiritual and romantic love.

Another factor to consider is the trio's lack of female relationships. While Wilde introduces heterosexual reinforcements, Dorian's relationships with women seldom flourish. He desires Sibyl Vane only for her acting abilities in bringing Shakespeare's characters to life. From Imogen to Rosalind and Cordelia to Juliet, Dorian only adores Sibyl when she takes on a role other than herself. When Lord Henry asks when she is ever Sibyl Vane, Dorian responds with "Never" (Wilde 58), because it is only when she acts that she is truly alive to Dorian. Again, Girard's theory is applicable. Dorian only desires her acting, not Sibyl herself. Dorian wants to possess her for her acting, but first he must free her from her contractor (Wilde 59). A competition between Dorian and the theater contractor arises, since both want to own Sibyl because of her talent. Even spectators are captivated by her, causing Dorian to realize her value and how he can profit from it. He plans to obtain a West End theater to "bring her out properly," and proclaims that her aptitude for acting "will make the world as mad as she made me" (59). But Dorian's love frees her from imitating a passion she does not feel, ruining her performance entirely (90). Sibyl professes how performing while in love would be a "profanation" since:

> the words I had to speak were unreal, were not my words, were not what I wanted to say. You [Dorian] had brought me something higher, something of which all art is but a reflection. You had made me understand what love really is… You are more to me than all art can ever be. What have I to do with the puppets of a play? When I came on to-night I could not understand how it was that everything had gone from me. I thought I was going to be wonderful. I found that I could do nothing. Suddenly it dawned on my soul what it all meant. (90-91)

Sibyl is aware how her acting is a mimicry of false passions. Once she is conscious of the artificial world she performs in, she can no longer entertain because Dorian's love destroys her. In repulsion, he reproaches Sibyl and expresses how she could have been "famous, splendid, [and] magnificent. The world would have worshipped you, and you would have borne my name. What are you now? A third-rate actress with a pretty face" (91). After denouncing Sibyl, Dorian realizes his love only stems from her performances. He views her as an object of desire and only wishes to possess the attractive qualities that surround her. Once she loses the only quality that drew Dorian, her existence becomes futile in his world.

As for Basil and Lord Henry, Basil seldom mentions his female acquaintances, and Lord Henry's wife divorces him near the end of the novel. Since the three main characters are unable (or unwilling) to maintain heterosexual partners, this suggests the

trio lacks a need for female counterparts; they have come to terms with their gay identity. As Cohen notes, Wilde introduces

> the feminine into a world that systematically denies it, [and] Dorian's attraction to the young actress Sibyl Vane (a vain portent?) seems to violate the male-identified world…Yet, Sibyl's presence can never actually disturb the novel's male logic, for her appearance merely shows how much an overtly heterosexual discourse depends on male-defined representations of female experience. For Dorian, Sibyl exists only in the drama. (809)

Women in *Dorian Gray* are marginalized characters, only relevant when involved in idle chatter with the male leads. Lord Henry's wife exemplifies this, as she is seen only once in the novel when Dorian has a brief conversation with her while waiting for Lord Henry to arrive (Wilde 48-50). Afterwards, she is hardly mentioned. Another example is when Lord Henry speaks to the Duchess of Monmouth. Interestingly enough, the Duchess is portrayed as a clever woman with wit matching Dorian and Lord Henry, as seen by their exchanges (200, 211). After the banter ends, the Duchess' presence conveniently fades. Her residence is then used for plot purposes, as the setting leads to Dorian's encounter with James Vane. Again, the novel is dominated by a male cast, and women in *Dorian Gray* hardly impact male bonding. As for Basil, he never mentions his own relationships but his fixation on Dorian is apparent. Likewise, Allen confirms how "Wilde does not overtly articulate the relations between the novel's three central males as homosexual, yet even to the casual reader the affinities between Dorian, Lord Henry, and Basil seem to extend beyond the homosocial ties of male bonding" (116). Dorian, Basil, and Lord Henry's relationship transcends friendship and shifts into the sphere of male desire. In Dorian's world, male interactions overshadow all feminine aspects. The camaraderie between the three main characters easily overpowers heterosexual reinforcements.

Fixation on the Proletariat Class

After reexamining the trio's relationship through Girard's theory of desire, it's important to analyze how Dorian's social class factors into the relationships he pursues. Dorian's association with nameless working-class men are intentionally vague and suggestive, and it's implied he can get away with his actions because seldom anyone pays heed to those in the lower stratum of society. This allows Dorian to pursue what society deems as perversions because his interactions with the lower class will only circulate among them. Through Dorian's relationships with working-class men, Wilde intentionally allows queer identity to flourish through cross-class liaisons.

During this era, upper-class men often engaged in flings with their lower-class counterparts; sexual encounters served as an experiment or transaction between social groups (Weeks 118). Despite the disparity between upper and lower classes, a "cash nexus with all its class resonances pervaded all sorts of relationships" (118). In some cases, working-class men participated in sexual exchanges for money. Weeks further suggests that "there was a much more clearly defined sense of same-sex self-identity among men of the upper and middle classes," allowing these individuals to engage in "frequent homosexual encounters" because of their "mobility and money" (119). Wilde, himself, was from a reputable middle-class family, which enabled him to navigate societal lines, seeking any relationship he desired. In addition, Richard Ellmann confirms that Wilde pursued relationships with working class youths (389), thus drawing parallels between the author's personal preferences and Dorian's frequent excursions to lower class establishments, such as rundown theaters or back alley pubs. These parallels between author and character support the possibility that Dorian's interactions are homosexual in intent.

Given Dorian's privileged standing, it would be unusual for him to marry someone from a lower social class. When Basil learns of Dorian's engagement to Sibyl, he is astonished. He remarks to Lord Henry, "But think of Dorian's birth, and position, and wealth. It would be absurd for him to marry so much beneath him" (Wilde 77), and Basil calls it a "silly infatuation" (78). Lord Henry agrees, saying, "As for the marriage, of course that would be silly, but there are other and more interesting bonds between men and women. I will certainly encourage them. They have the charm of being fashionable" (79). Lord Henry comments how other "bonds" have the thrill of novelty, which could include same-sex trysts or experimental encounters. Even so, as part of

the upper class, Dorian's wealth and position enable him to pursue a variety of experiences and cross-class liaisons with both men and women.

Furthermore, Dorian's relationship with proletariat women is noteworthy because "his impossible liaisons with the lower-class Sybil and, later, the village girl, Hetty Merton…signal Dorian's displacement from conventional heterosexuality" (Bristow 61). Even Dorian's nightly excursions to red-light districts are clear indicators of his unconventional sexuality. His disguises for these outings reflect secrecy, since he "learns that what he takes pleasure in is not permitted in public; his delights are consigned to secrecy" (61). His preference for the working class is evident, ranging from Sibyl Vane to Hetty Merton, to the foreign sailors and thieves; furthermore, it's Dorian's mobility across class lines that enables him to experiment with his sexuality. Though he fraternizes with both men and women, his preference is indisputably with working class men, as he seemingly finds novelty in those who belong to a different social class.

As opposed to Dorian's relationship with women, his interactions with male counterparts are vaguely written or omitted. Bristow asserts that "Wilde is strategically silent about Dorian's barely glimpsed life along the shadowy docks" (60), insinuating his "secret relations" with men are sexual in nature. Dorian is allegedly "seen brawling with foreign sailors in a low den," and he "consorted with thieves and coiners and knew the mysteries of their trade" (Wilde 145). "The mysteries of their trade" is possibly a euphemism for the ability to solicit other individuals. As Weeks points out, "The common use of the term 'trade' for any sort of sexual transaction, whether or not money was involved, indicated this graphically and it certainly seems to have been used in this sense by the mid-nineteenth century, as a vivid metaphor for sexual barter" (118). Dorian learns how to offer propositions to other men because his wealth allows him to seek sexual gratification from willing individuals. After all, "Beautiful sins, like beautiful things, are the privilege of the rich" (Wilde 83). Although the novel renders Dorian's reasons for going out open ended, his interests are clear. The proletariat class entices Dorian repeatedly to opium dens, tawdry theaters, brothels, or establishments offering cheap thrills with the working class. Weeks concludes:

> in writings on male homosexuality of the late nineteenth century there was a widespread belief that the working class was relatively indifferent to homosexual behavior, partly because they were 'closer to nature', and the two great swathes of male prostitution, with working-class youths in their teens, and with Guardsmen…These classes and gender interactions (working class = real men = closeness to nature) were to play important roles in the homosexual world. (120)

Virility, ruggedness, and manual labor are stereotypically associated with the working-class male, suggesting true masculinity is achieved through a labored body. Working class males were perceived to have a closer resemblance to nature because of their physicality. The "closeness to nature" could also reference the Garden of Eden, an unadulterated time when man was content and unaware of vices. Dorian's liaisons satisfy his carnality because these men accept or are indifferent to his behavior. His conduct displaces him from conventional heterosexuality, yet the lower class tolerates him either because they are indifferent or because he has wealth to pursue his sexual preferences for men. The ambiguous and absent details surrounding these relationships could be a signal for homosexuality shrouded in intentional silence.

Dorian Gray and Queer Theory

Wilde's biography and scholarship on *Dorian Gray* reinforce queer desire between the central characters. Dorian's concealment of his identity reflected the author's own predicament, as homosexuality was considered a perversion and malady during his lifetime. Wilde used Lord Henry, Basil, and Dorian as an outlet, exploring male relationships and their consequences. While most of the male characters suffered tragedies, such as Lord Henry's divorce, those exhibiting an interest in a member of the same sex paid the ultimate price: death. Prime examples include Basil's murder, Alan Campbell's suicide, and Dorian's own fate when he stabbed the portrait. The implication must be that only in death can one be accepted, forgiven, or liberated from a homophobic society. Even Wilde himself suffered a similar end. He was prosecuted, his novel was used against him in his trials, and he was sentenced to years of hard labor before dying penniless on his deathbed. Despite the tragedy he faced, his novel lives on as a testament

to those who struggled with their queer identities and wished to be accepted by society. Through his characters, Wilde was able to find other avenues to express himself, and thus, help contribute to queer literature.

Finally, while the hallmark of *Dorian Gray* is the aging portrait and its Faustian elements, his story ultimately depicted a fatal attraction and a life condemned to secrecy. It is unfortunate for Wilde, and other individuals during his time, to have lived their lives in fear because of their sexuality. Wilde's predicament mirrored Dorian's, as Dorian was afraid of being exposed. To reduce the apprehension of being outed, Dorian pursued nocturnal escapades and affiliated with the lower class in their environment. His cross-class liaisons were unusual, but it offered him the novelty he desired that was frowned upon by those of his status. As for the relationship of Basil, Dorian, and Lord Henry, their dynamic extends beyond the normal ties of male bonding, as suggested by their confessions, the use of Greek allusions, and coded language. It would be unconvincing to acknowledge these indicators as a sign of close friendship and nothing else, as moments of attraction were acted upon. Despite author and character alike suffering for their sexuality, the only liberation each had was in secrecy and death.

Even as multiple characters in *Dorian Gray* experienced tragedies, attraction, and revelations, Wilde only reflected his society's views through Dorian's death. Dorian exuded a fatal attraction to everyone he met, corrupting and leading others astray, similar to how Wilde's society viewed homosexual individuals. Today, now in a more tolerant society, a queer theory approach recovers the gay identity hidden away by heterosexual reinforcements. While there are other ways to interpret the novel, *Dorian Gray* benefits from this approach because of its exploration and emphasis on male bonds and desire. Throughout his novel, Wilde depicted his experiences and indulgences and ultimately represented his queer identity through Lord Henry, Basil, and Dorian. He was able to use these characters as an outlet for his sexuality and thus immortalized his testament to male love through *Dorian Gray*.

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