

Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* : A Self-Conscious Novel

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Abstract

This paper attempts to shed light on Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) and discuss the debatable issue of its genre: some critics see it as a Gothic novel while others suggest that it is a romance. The paper aims to investigate whether it is a self-conscious novel because a thorough reading and analysis of the text show that many of the elements of this genre are employed. A definition of the self-conscious novel is given to help determine the criteria required for the analysis. The novel is chosen for this study due to its importance in the history of the English novel. Also, it has been selected as the book of 2010 for Dublin City's 'One City, One Book Festival' in its fifth year. The paper concludes that it is a self-conscious novel, which gives it a unique position among the Victorian novels because this genre was not in vogue in the nineteenth century when realism was prominent in most works of art.

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صورة دوريان جراى لأوسكار وايلد: رواية التأمل التلقائى

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الملخص

أوسكار وايلد (1854-1900) شاعر ومؤلف مسرحى له العديد من المؤلفات الأدبية؛ ولكنه اشتهر كروائى عندما نشر روايته الوحيدة صورة دوريان جراى عام 1890، وقد قوبلت بعاصفة من النقد العنيف والهجوم الشديد لأن النقاد حينها وجدوا أنها تنتشر مبادئ لأخلاقية وفلسفات خاطئة مثل فلسفة البحث عن المتعة الحسية التى ينادى بها الأبيقوريون. وقد تم تصنيف الرواية كقصة رومانسية و خاصة روايات القرن 18 التى تسمى الرواية القوطية حيث الرهبة والقتل والانتحار ولوعة الحب.

يهدف البحث إلى تصنيف الرواية تحت مسمى رواية التأمل الداتى التى شاعت وانتشرت فى القرن العشرين ومن هنا فإن الرواية تتميز عن غيرها من روايات القرن 19 وتسبق روايات القرن العشرين بخصائص هذا النوع الأدبي. وأيضاً، يهدف البحث إلى إظهار أن وايلد كاتب أخلاقى له رسالة أخلاقية فى الرواية. ولتحقيق هذه الأهداف يقوم البحث بإعطاء تعريف لرواية التأمل الداتى وخصائصها وسماتها ثم تحليل النص واستخراج هذه السمات منه. وقد اختيرت هذه الرواية لأهميتها فى تاريخ الأدب الانجليزى لهذا البحث.

وانتهى البحث إلى أن هذه الرواية من روايات التأمل الداتى أ والتلقائى الذى يقوم فيه بطل الرواية بتوليد وانتاج هذا العمل الأدبى لما له من قدرات أدبيه تؤهله لكتابة رواية أو قصة، وقد نجح البطل دوريان جراى استخدام عناصر رواية التأمل الداتى مثل استخدام اليوميات فى تسجيل أحداث قصته يوماً بيوم، و استخدام راويا على علم بتفاصيل حياته ليروى القصة، وادخال المناقشات و التعليقات الأدبية والنقدية على فن الرواية داخل الرواية نفسها، و مناقشات حول الحياة والفن والأدب و الفلسفة والعلاقة بينهما و تأثيرها على تكوين شخصيه الفرد، ثم استخدام فن المحاكاة الأدبية و التلميحات الأدبية لأعمال أدبية بينها تشابهات مع هذا العمل الأدبى، والاستفادة من فكره المرأة أو الأنعكاسات الأدبية فى فن الرواية. وقد أثبت البحث أيضاً أن هذه الرواية لها هدف أخلاقى فهى تبين مخاطر إتباع فلسفات خاطئة وإساءة استخدام النعم مثل المال و الجمال و الانسحاق وراء المادية البحتة.

Introduction:

Oscar Wilde (1854 - 1900) is a poet, a playwright and a novelist. He is today remembered for his only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. On its publication (1890) it was greeted with outrage by reviewers who saw it as an immoral work. Some critics suggest that the novel is "a black fairy tale in which a spoiled boy gets his one wish — endless youthfulness and sensuality — and becomes a suicide because he cannot handle its implications" (Gates 4) while others see it as a classic gothic novel due to some elements characteristic of its plot and theme. The structure of the novel is based on the conceit of the plot which "staggers between Wildean frolics in which epigrams are dropped like confetti ... and attempts at gothic horror" (Mackie 1). In addition to its gothic theme, the novel "pivots on a gothic plot device by which a narcissistic young man makes a Faustian bargain to preserve his youthful beauty" (Ross 2). In the classic German legend Faust makes a bargain with the Devil, Mephistopheles, selling his soul for ultimate power. Dorian Gray, the hero of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, makes such a pact for immortal youth. Both Dorian and Faust are tempted to surrender moral integrity. Both entice beautiful girls to love them and then, destroy them. In the end, they destroy themselves instead of fulfilling their wishes. The idea of making a pact with the Devil has been tackled in many works of art. For example, Florentin, the hero of Francis Thompson's short story, 'Finis Coronat Opus' (1889) [Latin: The end crowns the work], holds a deal with the Devil to get poetic genius and fame in return for the murder of his wife. He is tempted, so he "murders his wife on the altar of Art. As with Dorian Gray, his wish is granted but brings nothing but misery and despair" (Pearce 248). Oscar Wilde claims that his plot is "an idea that is as old as the history of literature but to which I have given a new form" (Holland 435). The plot deals with such Faustian themes as murder, suicide and horror, which are recurrent in Gothic novels. For example, in Robert Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Jekyll murders Hyde though they love each other. Similarly, Dorian kills his loving friend, Basil. Both Dorian and Jekyll are badly influenced by the hypocritical bourgeois life of nineteenth century England and experiment with many vices and

crimes, which finally leads to their disintegration of self. As a result of adopting false abstracts and reading immoral books, Dorian becomes a sinner and a decadent. For instance, he reads a French book whose protagonist, Jean des Esseintes, is an aesthete who is badly affected by Parisian bourgeois life. This book is "Joris-Karl Huysmans's *A Rebours* (Against Nature)" (Mason 63). Wilde writes to a correspondent that he "played a fantastic variation upon *A Rebours* and some day must write it down" (Ellman 316). In addition, Dorian has read many stories of love and horror such as Alphonso's 'Clericalis Disciplina' and Lodge's 'A Margarite of America' (156; ch.11). In *Clericalis Disciplina* (A Training School for the Clergy), written by the Spanish writer, Petrus Alphonso, who lived in the 11th century, there is a collection of thirty three stories composed of oriental tales and episodes of love and horror. Thomas Lodge's *A Margarite of America* (1596) is a romance whose plot deals with a love story of a faithful girl, Margarite and a spoiled man, Arsadachus. It is a story of love and horror. Because *The Picture of Dorian Gray* portrays love, horror, violence, decadence and grotesque in the Victorian life, it is often described to be an "odd gothic novel" (Terpening 1). Grotesque is identified to be "a term that we employ to describe the jarringly unnatural...instances of disorder" in fiction (Landow 74). Ingrid Hanson suggests that romances full of grotesque and violence "celebrate the haptic and kinaesthetic development of self and identity....Love is not reduced by, but rather, expressed through various kinds of battle" (Hanson 3). Dorian kills his loving friend, Basil, who adores him and causes his beloved, Sibyl, to commit suicide. The reason for this violence is the fact that he "may have been caught in the modern struggle to inhabit an identity without becoming defined by it. The ghastly ending ... shows a man losing battle with his public image"(Ross 1). This may be the reason for critics' claim that the novel is a gothic classic. However, this paper tries to look upon it from another perspective.

The paper aims to explore if Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a self-conscious novel. It tries to find out the narrative aspects that make of it a proper self-conscious novel. A critical reading and analysis of the text help to show the elements of this genre latent in the novel. The analysis takes into account the critical

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theory of self-conscious fiction to help determine the criteria required for the analysis. This novel is selected for this study because it established Wilde as a major novelist and it still occupies a unique position among the Victorian novels, many of which are realistic. Also, much critical controversy has centred on the text. The conclusion presents and discusses the results of the research.

Analysis of the text:

Critics classify the modes of self-conscious narrative into anti-novel, introverted novel, self-begetting novel, surfiction, irrealism and fabulation, all of which "imply a fiction that self-consciously reflects upon its own structure as language" (Waugh 14). Self-consciousness means self-reflection and self-reflexivity; a work of art exhibits an awareness of its artificiality, highlights its relation to previous texts, and presents a "demonstration of its knowledge both of its literary techniques, including its language, and of its status as fiction" (Lucente 19). The fictional self-reflexivity dispels the illusion that a work of art is a window upon reality and it "undermines the traditional view that the novel...the novella and the short story have a privileged relationship to reality" (Holmes 21). Self-reflexivity grounds that a self-conscious work is of a nature different from a realistic or a naturalistic work. A critic, Linda Hutcheon, describes self-consciousness in the novel to be "narcissism" and designates the forms of self-consciousness to be "self-reflective, self-informing, self-reflexive, auto-referential, auto representational" (*Narcissistic Narrative* 8,2). A self-conscious novel is defined as "a sub-genre of the modern French, British, and American novel....A fantasy of Narcissus becomes autogamous" (Kellman 3). *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is therefore a 'fantasy of Narcissus' because its protagonist is described to be a Narcissus in four specific references in the text. For example, Lord Henry refers to him as "young Adonis, who looks as if he was made out of ivory and rose-leaves....he is a Narcissus" (9; ch.1). Sibyl, Dorian's beloved, is also described to be a narcissus when Dorian says, "We kissed each other...She trembled all over and shook like a white narcissus"(90; ch.6). This description is metaphorical because the simile shows she is beautiful and her movements are graceful. As for Dorian, his narcissism means that he is "becoming self-conscious"

(70; ch.4), especially after he adopts the philosophy of hedonism. He is a Narcissus in a narcissistic, that is, a self-conscious novel. This may be an allusion to the myth of Narcissus and Echo, which "represents one of the earliest and most powerfully conveyed examples of unrestrained female sexuality in literature" (Dawson 2). Like Echo, Sibyl is destined to death in spite of her true love.

Although the modes of self-consciousness are more evident in the twentieth century narrative, they can be traced back into the seventeenth and eighteenth century novel. *Don Quijote* and *Tristram Shandy* are examples of early self-conscious works that are "markedly conscious of themselves as language, as written, printed, discourse, as literature, more than the fathers of the modern novel; they are truly the paradigms for much of contemporary self-reflexive fiction" (Bell 84). Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759) stands out as clear specimen of the self-conscious novels that dramatize an intruding narrator who is "visibly engaged in the invention of his narrative" (Stonehill 19) and present some discussions on their composition in the act of writing. There is some similarity between the eighteenth and twentieth century novels, which are concerned with "the dominant conception of art as artifact in contrast to the nineteenth-century view of art as imitation" (Christensen 11). In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* there is some discussion of the idea of imitation: Hallward remarks, "Love is a more wonderful thing than Art", to which Lord Henry replies, "They are both simply forms of imitation" (99; ch.7). In the painter's view, Art cannot imitate true love. Sibyl explains this fact when she admits, "I hate the stage. I might mimic a passion that I do not feel, but I cannot mimic one that burns me like fire" (101; ch.7). After she experiences true love towards Dorian, she acts badly on the stage. Then, imitation cannot express real feelings and sensations, so Wilde challenges the traditional narrow concept of nineteenth-century novelistic mimesis through the technique of self-consciousness. In the nineteenth century the self-conscious genre was not in vogue, due to the novelists' interest in realism and involvement with history. However, in the 1890s there appeared some works that deserve further examination because they include many self-conscious properties. For example, in his study of Marie Corelli's *The Sorrows of Satan*,

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Simon James concludes that it is a self-conscious novel because it seeks the relationship between literary criticism and literary pleasure and demands the reader's duty to respond with moral seriousness to the content of narrative, the nature of the procedure of reading and the meanings intended by the author. He suggests that the foregrounding of the act of reading within the text is "characteristic of fiction in this period. This paratext therefore draws attention to the fact that like many other 1890s novels such as *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, George Du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894), George Gissing's *New Grub Street* (1891), and numerous works of fiction by Henry James or New Woman Writers, *The Sorrows of Satan* is a self-conscious work about the making of art" (James 16). Here is some reference to the self-consciousness of Wilde's novel, which supports the aim of this paper.

The self-conscious novel is characterized by certain features, one of which is its peculiar self-reflexivity that allows it to "make frequent and prolonged allusion to other literary works. Each narrator is intent on incorporating and surpassing his predecessors....Murdoch evokes Sartre, Durrell evokes Proust, Lessing evokes Miller, etc." (Kellman 7). And so does Wilde; he evokes such classical writers, artists and philosophers as Plato, Epicurus, Shakespeare and Buonarroti. For example, Wilde evokes some writers who define the disfigured soul, saying, "Was it not Plato, that artist in thought, who had first analyzed it? Was it not Buonarroti who had carved it in the coloured marbles of a sonnet-sequence?" (46; ch.3). Patricia Waugh designates other common features of the self-conscious novel such as "the over-obtrusive, visibly inventing narrator...ostentatious typographic experiment...explicit dramatization of the reader...Chinese box structures...incantatory and absurd lists...over-systematized or overtly arbitrarily arranged structural devices...total breakdown of temporal and spatial organization of narrative...infinite regress...dehumanization of character, parodic doubles, obtrusive proper names...self-reflexive images...critical discussions of the story within the story...continuous undermining of specific fictional conventions...use of popular genres...explicit parody of previous texts whether literary or non-literary" (Waugh 21,22). Parody is the

most significant feature of the self-conscious novel. It is defined as "an exploration of difference and similarity" and "a generally overt form of narcissism, self-conscious as much as self-reflecting" (Hutcheon: *Narcissistic Narrative* 25,34). Parody helps set up literary parallels and offers new perspectives on the past conventions. It is a form of narcissism because it "both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies" (Hutcheon: *A poetics of Postmodernism* 11). As a result, a new form of the work of art is made up. For example, Andre Gide's *Les Caves du Vatican* (*The Vatican Cellars*, 1922) is "a composite parody...the narrator mimicks the tremulo of the pious novel of religious conversion,...sentimental romance,...the slow conversational musings about character, and motive of the nineteenth-century realists" (Alter 161). Also, John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) is a parody of "the structures of nineteenth-century realism and of historical romance or of fairy tales" (Waugh 13). Oscar Wilde makes literary parallels between classical techniques and nineteenth-century structures; he parodies the structures of Greek tragedy, Shakespearean drama, the Gothic novel and the romance.

Furthermore, the idea of 'mirroring' and the use of mirrors are distinctive features of the self-conscious novel because narrative mirroring means self-reflection. The idea of mirroring originates in the Spanish tradition of the 'baroque', which is characterized by the technical devices of "linguistic artifice, inter-and intra-textuality and narrative mirroring" (Hutcheon: *Narcissistic Narrative* 2). This idea is recurrent in such works as *The Alexandria Quartet* and *The Vatican Cellars*. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* this feature is also apparent. Lord Henry sends Dorian "a curiously- carved mirror" (181; ch.20) so that he can realize how beautiful he is. As a result, he becomes "physically conscious of his own existence and charm, as seen in the still water-mirror -- 'the shadow of a reflected form' " (Hutcheon: *Narcissistic Narrative* 13). In the end, Dorian destroys the mirror because it reflects his wrinkled face. On the other hand, the idea of mirroring is used in Basil's painting:--"As the painter looked at the gracious and comely form he had so skillfully mirrored in his art, a smile of pleasure passed across his face, and seemed

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about to linger there" (8; ch.1). In addition, Dorian considers this painting to be a mirror reflecting the features of his body and soul. Looking at it he "would be able to follow his mind into its secret places. This portrait would be to him the most magical of mirrors" (124; ch.8).

The Picture of Dorian Gray abounds in many of these features which help determine it as a self-conscious novel. It opens with Basil Hallward working on the portrait of Dorian Gray in his studio surrounded by a wonderful garden. Dorian confides a lot of his secrets and sensations to this painter, who reflects them in his painting. The picture is regarded as a form of autobiography:--"We live in an age when men treat art as if it were meant to be a form of autobiography. We have lost the abstract sense of beauty" (18; ch.1). Art in the Victorian age is conceived of as a kind of autobiography because it tends to imitate and depict certain identities. The picture records a great part of Dorian's self and identity when Basil and Dorian "sit in the studio and talk of a thousand things" (19; ch.1). The picture reveals to Dorian what he has not already realized: his beauty--"The sense of his beauty came on him like a revelation" (33; ch.2), so he begins to be self-conscious. After the painting is finished, he looks upon it as if he were reading his autobiography; he first feels happy but on second thoughts, he turns sad, for he thinks: "I shall grow old, and horrible, and dreadful. But this picture will remain always young...If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old...I would give my soul for that!" (34; ch.2). Dorian wishes if his soul would be moved to the painting with which he makes a pact for immortality of his beauty. He is tempted by the hedonist, Lord Henry, so he thinks: "Youth is the only thing worth having. When I find that I am growing old, I shall kill myself" (34; ch.2). This wish is the beginning of Dorian's moral decay and disintegration of self. Dorian is now a real disciple of hedonism. An autobiographical element is introduced in the text because the author adopted this philosophy in his lifetime. However, he presents the character of Basil, the artist, as an opponent of this philosophical attitude to life. Basil warns Dorian of this philosophy and considers the painting to be "the real Dorian" (36; ch.2), because it keeps up his real beauty and morality. The painting records the

development and change of Dorian's identity as if it were a narrator of his life story. On the other hand, the author employs an intruding narrator to retell the story, comment on the events, and share in the critical discussion running on in the text. He also presents a cast of artists and intellectual figures who share in long discussions about life, art, fiction, philosophy and relationships between them. The use of a cast of artist figures is a feature of self-conscious narrative. For example, Murdoch's *Under the Net* dramatizes a cast of artist figures including a singer, an actress, a film producer and a philosopher.

The critical discussion begins with Basil's suggestion that a new school of art should dominate the nineteenth century, a school that is to incorporate in it "all the passion of the romantic spirit, all the perfection of the spirit that is Greek. The harmony of soul and body—how much that is! We in our madness have separated the two, and have invented a realism that is vulgar, an ideality that is void" (17; ch.1). In this passage the author shows his refusal of the realism of the nineteenth century and his parody of the styles of Greek tragedy and the romance. He, for example, presents the character of Dorian "with the air of a young Greek martyr" (24; ch.2) and of Lord Henry with "romantic olive-coloured face and worn expression" (28; ch.2). When Dorian and Lord Henry meet, Lord Henry is able to influence Dorian with his touching words and musical expressions. The narrator interferes to explain the situation, saying, "words spoken by chance, no doubt, and with willful paradox in them had touched some secret chord... Mere words! How terrible they were! How clear, and vivid and cruel! And what a subtle magic there was in them! They seemed to be able to give a plastic form to formless things, and to have music of their own as sweet as that of viola or of lute" (26,27; ch.2). Lord Henry's speech is full of paradoxes because he thinks, "the way of paradoxes is the way of truth" (49; ch.3). However, they cause Dorian to have disintegration of self when he makes friends with Lord Henry. This piece of comment and analysis of shows the narrator's critical ability.

The narrator recounts a romance of Dorian's mother, giving some details about Dorian's family and childhood: his mother was so beautiful that every man in the town wanted to marry her. She escaped with a young man she loved because her father refused him.

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She got married to him without her father's consent, so he plotted their murder after giving birth to her child. After retelling the events of this romance the narrator makes a self-conscious discussion of its elements, giving a summary of its plot, saying: "So that was the story of Dorian Gray's parentage. Crudely as it had been told to him, it had yet stirred him by its suggestion of a strange, almost modern romance. A beautiful woman risking everything for a mad passion. A few wild weeks of happiness cut short by a hideous, treacherous crime. Months of voiceless agony, and then a child born in pain. The mother snatched away by death, the boy left to solitude and the tyranny of an old and loveless man" (44,45; ch.3). The narrator describes this love story to be a modern romance, beginning with love and ending in death, so it is a romance of love and horror and Dorian is the "Son of Love and Death" (46; ch.3). In his comment he uses some literary elements like passion, pathos and pity—"What a pity it was that such beauty was destined to fade!" (45; ch.3). In this love story both romance and tragedy are integrated, so the narrator remarks, "it was an interesting background...Behind every exquisite thing that existed, there was something tragic" (45; ch.3). It is an example of the new school that is to have in it the passion of romance and the perfection of Greek tragedy. This romance is followed by another romance of love and horror to support this new attitude. Like his mother, Dorian's beloved, Sibyl, is loyal and beautiful. She is the victim of a mad passion towards her lover. The narrator describes this love affair to be "the greatest romance" (60; ch.4), which ends in death. However, Lord Henry shares in the discussion and advises Dorian to forget it and to seek another love story, for a "grande passion is the privilege of people who have nothing to do...That is merely the beginning" (60; ch.4). He suggests that this ending should be the beginning of another love affair because those who love only once in their lives are "shallow people. What they call their loyalty, and their fidelity, I call... their lack of imagination...Go on with your story" (60; ch.4). The author continuously undermines some fictional devices, which is a feature of self-conscious narrative, through the character of Lord Henry. In this passage, he undermines the elements of passion and fidelity in a romance. Moreover, he defines a romance, saying: "When one is in

love, one always begins by deceiving one's self, and one always ends by deceiving others. That is what the world calls a romance" (63; ch.4). In his view, the lovers in a romance require plenty of imagination to avoid tragic endings. The intruding narrator concludes the discussion, saying: "Sometimes this was the effect of art, and chiefly of the art of literature, which dealt immediately with the passions and the intellect. But now and then a complex personality took the place and assumed the office of art, was indeed, in its way, a real work of art" (69; ch.4). Art or literature can contribute to the analysis of a complex personality, which appeals to the reader's intellect and shows respect for his intelligence. The dramatization of a reader within the text is a feature of the self-conscious novel because it "welds a bond of intimacy with its actual readers that is beyond the means of naturalistic, non-self-conscious novels" (Stonehill 7).

In a long discussion of Dorian's love story the characters, including the narrator, lay bare the elements of tragedy and romance, make some allusions to some genres and literary works, and undermine some fictional devices. Dorian describes Sybil's suicide to be like the ending of a Greek tragedy. It contains "all the terrible beauty of a Greek tragedy, a tragedy in which I took a part, but by which I have not been wounded" (117; ch.8). Lord Henry agrees with Dorian that there is something "quite beautiful about her death. I am glad I am living in a century when such wonders happen. They make one believe in the reality of the things we all play with, such as romance, passion, and love" (119; ch.8). He refers to the realism of the nineteenth century literature and explains that the real tragedies of life, like Sibyl's death, often happen in "such an inartistic manner that they hurt us by their crude violence, their absolute incoherence, their absurd want of meaning, their entire lack of style" (117; ch.8). To console Dorian he advises him to think of her death "as a strange lurid fragment from some Jacobean tragedy, as a wonderful scene from Webster, or Ford, or Cyril Tournier" (120; ch.8). Jacobean tragedy is characterized by its sensational, violent and shocking scenes. However, Dorian thinks her tragic end is her "dreadful last scene" and she is "a wonderful tragic figure" (122; ch.8). Further, he describes her romance to be "one of the great

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romantic tragedies of the age" (127; ch.9), of which she is the tragic heroine. Although her lover has not played the role of heroism or martyrdom to save his beloved, the painter draws him as "Paris in dainty armour, and as Adonis with hunts-man's cloak and polished boar-spear. Crowned with heavy lotus-blossoms you had sat on the prow of Adrian's barge, gazing across the green turbid Nile" (133; ch.9). The author here uses the element of parody to find some similarities between the hero of this novel and some tragic figures in Greek mythologies. The discussion includes some allusions to literary genres like Jacobean tragedy, romantic tragedy and Greek legend.

A self-conscious work of art sometimes has as a central figure a novelist protagonist or an artist character who is able to compose his own story and to create it. Dorian Gray shares in the literary and critical discussion running in the novel about literature and art because he is interested in literature and has read a lot of books and works of art like "Les Cent Nouvelles, bound for Margaret of Valois by Clovis Eve" and "an elaborately-illustrated edition of Manon Lescaut" (55; ch.4). *Les Cent Nouvelles* (1486) is a collection of five stories collected by Antoine de Sale. They tell histories of five men and give a view of the social life in the fifteenth century. There is another book, entitled *Le Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles* (1762), by Madame de Gomez (1684-1770). It contains short stories in French. As for *Manon Lescaut* (1731), it is a short novel by the French author, Abbe Prevost. It is a love story of the Chevalier des Grieux and his beloved, Manon. He runs away with her and forfeits his wealth. In the end, she dies of exposure and exhaustion during one of their adventures in Louisiana. However, the strangest book Dorian has read is *A Rebours*, a French novel Lord Henry has lent him. The narrator describes it to be "a poisonous book...a form of reverie, a malady of dreaming" (146; ch.10), which has badly influenced Dorian. The narrator attributes this reverie to Gothic art, saying, "through the chambers of the brain sweep phantoms more terrible than reality itself, and instinct with that vivid life that lurks in all grotesque, and that lends to Gothic art its enduring vitality" (151; ch.11). Dorian also considers the Gothic stories he has read to be the basis of his imagination and of "the record of his life, not as he has

lived it in act and circumstance but as his imagination had created it for him" (166; ch.11). The narrator uses parody to find out some similarities between *A Rebours* and Dorian's life story. The author also presents some parodic doubles between his novel, Gothic novel and French romance. He gives this piece of self-reflexive, self-conscious comment on the French novel, laying bare the process of its composition: "It was a novel without a plot, and with only one character, being, indeed, simply a psychological study of a certain young Parisian, who spent his life trying to realize in the nineteenth century all the passions and modes of thought that belonged to every century except his own" (145; ch.10). He describes its style to be "curious jeweled style, vivid and obscure at once, full of argot and of archaisms, of technical expressions and of elaborate paraphrases, that characterizes the work of some of the finest artists of the French school of Symbolistes. There were in metaphors as monstrous as orchids, and as subtle in colour" (145; ch.10). The author uses the terms of mystical philosophy to describe the sensations of the protagonist. The cadence of the sentences and the subtle monotony of their music, full of complex refrains and movements, have attracted Dorian to reading it several times. This is an example of self-reflexivity in a self-conscious novel. Like this young Parisian, Dorian is a representative of his own century. Dorian regards this Parisian as "a kind of prefiguring type of himself. And, indeed, the whole book seemed to him to contain the story of his own life, written before he had lived it" (147; ch.11). The narrator seems to introduce the element of parody to find similarities between French and English fiction in the nineteenth century, especially the romance and symbolic novel. Parody is here bound to be "a way of enlivening a self-consciously critical art form from below" (Alter 177), so it demands a more literary reading and a recognition of literary conventions. In Hutcheon's view, it is wrong to see its function "as mockery, ridicule, or mere destruction" (*Narcissistic Narrative* 25).

There are many references to Dorian's literary ability and recognition of literary tradition throughout the text. For example, he borrows this line from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to describe his painting,--"Like the painting of a Sorrow, A Face without a heart" (174; ch.19). Also, in his comment on Sibyl's death he is shown to

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be a good reader of literature,-- "If I had read all this in a book, I think I would have swept over it" (115; ch.8). The narrator interferes to inform the reader that Dorian has also read many books about music, jewels, perfumes and embroidery. He explains that Dorian finds an analogy between himself and the figures he has met in the stories of past times and feels that he has known "those strange terrible figures that had passed across the stage of the world and made sin so marvelous, and evil so full of subtlety. It seemed to him that in some mysterious way their lives had been his own" (166; ch.11). Dorian has been so greatly influenced by these terrible figures that he sometimes "looked on evil simply as a mode through which he could realize his conception of the beautiful" (168; ch.11). His imagination has been poisoned by the stories of these terrible figures, particularly those who were poisoned or poisoned their lovers. The narrator presents ten stories of poisoning, whose tragic figures are Flippo, Duke of Milan; Pietro Barbie, the Venetian; Gian Maria Visconti; the Borgia; Pietro, the young Cardinal Archbishop of Florence; Ezzelin; Gimbattista Cibo; Sigismondo Malatesta; Charles VI; and Grifonetto Baglioni (167,168; ch.11). The text abounds in many of these obtrusive proper names, which is a feature of self-conscious narrative.

In addition to his wide reading and interest in literature, Dorian often attends several performances of drama and the Opera. He, for example, attends *Tannhauser*, an opera written by the German writer, Richard Wagner. In its prelude he finds "a presentation of the tragedy of his own soul" (156; ch.11). Also, he often attends performances of Shakespearean plays like *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*. He not only attends but also gives critical comments on these performances. The following passage is a comment on one of the performances of *Romeo and Juliet*. It is full of similes, metaphors and some allusions to Greek drama:- "Romeo was a stout elderly gentleman, with corked eyebrow, a husky tragedy voice, and a figure like a beer-barrel....But Juliet! a girl, hardly seventeen years of age, with a little flower-like face, a small Greek head ..., eyes that were violet wells of passion, lips that were like the petals of a rose" (61; ch.4). Dorian is pleased to watch Sibyl acting the roles of some Shakespearean heroines like Ophelia, Desdemona and Juliet, but on

the night of her death, she acts badly, which makes him criticize her severely. The lines she has recited "were spoken in a thoroughly artificial manner. The voice was exquisite, but from the point of view of tone it was absolutely false. It was wrong in colour. It took away all the life from the verse. It made the passion unreal (97;ch.7). In this passage Dorian lays bare the process of acting and the traditional elements of literature like tone, color, passion and character to show that the wrong use of these narrative elements spoils the artifice of a work of art. Her bad acting takes away the life and passion from the verse she recites, which explores the relation between art and literature. She has acted badly when she realizes the reality of true love with Dorian, not love on the stage. Here, the narrator interferes to explain the function of art, saying, "Art is always more abstract than we fancy. Form and colour tell us of form and colour—that is all...art conceals the artist far more completely than it ever reveals him" (134; ch.9).

Dorian is therefore able to compose a story of his own life in the form of a work of art. He explains how he writes it down, saying "I keep a diary of my life from day to day, and it never leaves the room in which it is written" (176; ch.12). The author here makes an allusion to the literary device of writing diaries; Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is an example. This method is also followed by some modern writers. Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point* (1928), for example, includes a novelist-protagonist, Philip Quarles, who keeps "a personal diary for the purpose of transmuting observed reality to fiction" (Kellman 85). In his diary Dorian keeps his secrets and sensations which he does not confide to his friends. When Dorian tells his friend, Basil, that he is "the one man in the world who is entitled to know everything about me" (178; ch.13), he means 'everything' that is good about his life. However, the painting reflects his bad actions, so he hides it in the library. When Basil insists on seeing it, he is terrified to find Dorian's "hideous face on the canvas grinning at him" with "the eyes of a devil" (179,180; ch13). Then, the painting also keeps a diary of Dorian's life, which shows a new relation between art and literature. In its diary the painting records Dorian's real feelings and sentiments. When he pretends to be good, the painting continues to reflect his bad actions because he is a

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hypocrite. The narrator explains that the diary shows three reasons for Dorian's sins: "vanity? Curiosity? Hypocrisy?" (184; ch.20). Dorian's soul has been poisoned by Lord Henry's philosophy and the books he lent him, which Lord Henry denies, saying: "As for being poisoned by a book, there is no such thing as that. Art has no influence upon action...the books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world its own shame" (179; ch.19). According to this view, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which is charged of being immoral, exposes the vices of the Victorian society through the presentation of some immoral actions. Dorian's identity is a representation of the English identity in the nineteenth century and "the identity-defining other – who is, of course, Dorian – is manifestly both cultural fantasy and self-projection, a simultaneous internalization and anatomy of the scene Victorian fiction and Victorian culture located on the streets" (Jaffe 158). The novel can therefore be looked upon in the context of "late nineteenth-century ideologies that may be viewed as precursors of a modern symbolic politics of identity: ideologies in which the individual is with increasing frequency imagined as a member of a group" (Jaffe 166). Also, the novel can be listed as one of the modernist self-conscious novels due to some elements latent in its plot which "begins as an alluring fable [but] ends as a full-on modernist nightmare" (Ross 3). On the other hand, art, in Lord Henry's view, has no influence upon action. It is a false view, because there is a bond of intimacy between art, literature and life. The narrator thinks that the canons of life should be "the same as the canons of art. Form is absolutely essential to it. It should have the dignity of a ceremony, as well as its unreality, and should combine the insincere character of a romantic play with the wit and beauty that make such plays delightful to us. Is insincerity such a terrible thing? I think not. It is merely a method by which we can multiply our personalities. Such, at any rate, was Dorian Gray's opinion" (164; ch.11). Here, the narrator refers to one of the essential features of self-conscious narrative, that is, dehumanization of character.

This feature is explicitly presented in the character of Dorian. The author takes away from it such human qualities as sincerity, pity, sympathy, forgiveness, patience, mercy and ambition. Dorian

thinks that insincerity is not a bad thing, so he practices it with his friends and the girls who have loved him. He deserts Sibyl just for her bad acting on the stage on the night when he invites Basil and Lord Henry to watch her acting *Romeo and Juliet*. She begs him not to leave her because she can no longer act well after she has known real love. Although she dies for love of him, he feels no pity for her. When Basil wants to console him for her loss, Dorian says, "if you really want to console me, teach me rather to forget what has happened, or to see it from the proper artistic point of view. Was not Gautier who used to write about *La Consolation des Arts*?" (128; ch.9). This shows how his action is greatly influenced by his readings. He tries to be sincere with another girl, Hetty Merton, but he finally leaves her. As for his friends, he kills his only true friend, Basil, at the moment when Basil advises him to turn good again. Dorian admits that Basil is sincere and his love of him is true, for it "had nothing in it that was not noble and intellectual...It was such love as Michael Angelo had known, and Montaigne, and Wickelmann, and Shakespeare himself" (138,9 ch.10). He asks another friend, Alan Campbell, the chemist, to hide Basil's body in a chemical way. He blackmails Alan, who finally commits suicide. Dorian has acquired many of these bad qualities from Lord Henry, whose paradoxes show dehumanization of his character. For example, he says, "I like persons better than principles, and I like persons with no principles better than anything else in the world" (16; ch.1). And about marriage, he thinks, "The one charm of marriage is that it makes a life of deception absolutely necessary for both parties" (10; ch.1). As a result, his wife deceives him and elopes with another man. These dehumanized characters are often employed to undermine some literary conventions. For example, Lord Henry undermines the function of pathos in Sibyl's accident, saying, "pathos left you unmoved, but that beauty, mere beauty, could fill your eyes with tears" (62; ch.4), because he considers her beauty to be a curse, not a blessing, to her .

Conclusion:

To conclude, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a self-conscious novel because it is fiction about the making of fiction. It calls for a new genre that derives its conventions from the passion of the

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romantic spirit and the perfection of the Greek spirit. It includes many of the elements that characterize this genre such as self-reflexivity, self-reflection, allusions to other works of art, infinite regress to previous literary or non-literary texts, the use of parody of such literary genres as Gothic novel and Romance, the employment of a cast of artist figures, critical discussions about art, fiction, life, philosophy and the relationship between them, and the presentation of such ideas as immortality, mirroring and mirrors. The author employs an intruding, inventing narrator who shares with the other characters literary and critical discussions of the story within the story. In these discussions there is continuous undermining of some fictional conventions to pave the way for new ones. For example, the element of pathos is undermined to the extent that death is no longer pathetic. Beauty is more pathetic. As a result of the feature of dehumanization of some characters, they lose some human qualities like pity, compassion and loyalty.

The protagonist of the novel is interested in literature and a good reader in classics, so he shares in the self-conscious process of fiction inside the text. He often makes self-reflexive images from the stories he has read to comment on the events in this story. In addition, he is able to write down a story, so he keeps the events of his life in a diary and records them in the form of an autobiography. He combines the Hellenistic and the Romantic traditions in his narrative. In his essay, 'The English Renaissance of Art', Oscar Wilde suggests that the Hellenic spirit and the spirit of romance should form the principal elements of the conscious intellectual tradition in the Victorian Age. He explains why he adopts this artistic view in his novel, saying "It is really from the union of Hellenism, in its breadth, its sanity of purpose, its calm possession of beauty, with the adventive, the intensified individualism, the passionate colour of the romantic spirit, that springs the art of the nineteenth century in England" (Wilde: the English Renaissance of Art 58). As a self-conscious novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* relies a lot on this union. Lord Henry thinks that the Hellenic time is the ideal one for the man who "were to live out his life fully and completely, were to give form to dream...we would forget all the maladies of mediaevalism and return to the Hellenic ideal" (25; ch.2). He himself adopts hedonism, a philosophy

originating in the Hellenic time. The presentation of some upper-class characters as representatives of the Hellenic ideal in the novel copes with the prominent notion that knowledge of Greek culture was limited to the people of this class who "believed they were rightful inheritors of an ancient legacy (that) is a basis of cultural authority" (Fiske 4).

Oscar Wilde studied Greek culture and literature at Oxford where he learned the principles of hedonism and aestheticism at the hands of Walter Pater. He also paid many visits to Greece and became so interested in Greek heritage that some critics "Hellenized" him (Coakley 170). However, the paper regards Wilde as a moralist who exposes many vices and false abstracts and warns humans of adopting them: the continual search for physical pleasure, the decay of spiritualism and emotionalism, vanity, hypocrisy, and disintegration of self. Some critics support this view, saying: "the message of the text is one of sincerity and morality—even anti-decadence... (and) represents the dawning of a new twentieth-century literary tradition in which author and narrator are more easily distanced" (Terpening: Epicurus 1-2). Then, Wilde should be distanced from his work. If Wilde is accused of decadence, his novel conveys a moral lesson to the reader, who has to conclude it from the text because the author "refuses to moralize, to tell the artist what to do or the reader what to think. Each individual must devise his own ethical code" (Ross 3). In a self-conscious novel the reader is dramatized to show a bond of intimacy between him and the author. In addition, some critics enlist Wilde in the small circle of the English sages of the nineteenth century because his message is "a sincere adoption of the sage's toolkit" (Terpening: Is Oscar Wilde a sage? 1) while others see him as one of "the small but courageous band of men who strove to bring about the legal and social emancipation of men" (McKenna XII). Wilde succeeds in conveying his moral lesson in a modern self-conscious novel.

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