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## THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING USELESS: REVOLUTION AND JUDGMENT IN THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

By

Marshall Johnson

B.A., Saint Louis University, 2007

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master of Arts Degree in English Literature.

> Department of English Literature in the Graduate School Southern Illinois University Carbondale August 2011

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### THESIS APPROVAL

# THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING USELESS: REVOLUTION AND JUDGMENT IN $THE\ PICTURE\ OF\ DORIAN\ GRAY$

By

Marshall Johnson

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in the field of English Literature.

Approved by:

Ryan Netzley, Chair

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Michael Molino

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5/5/11

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

MARSHALL JOHNSON, for the Master of Arts degree in ENGLISH LITERATURE,

presented on 5/5/11, at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale.

Title: THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING USELESS: REVOLUTION AND JUDGMENT

IN THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

Major Professor: Dr. Ryan Netzley

The preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is often dismissed as merely an

addendum to the novel intended to detract hostile readers and absolve the text itself of

any accusations of immorality. When coupled with the narrative itself, however, the

novel shows both the impossibility of producing the new through traditional notions of

revolution, as well as the way in which the Deleuzian conception of judgment inhibits

Dorian from ever viewing the portrait as insignificantly amoral, as not symbolic of his

sins. Yet the preface, coupled with the various aesthetic objects in the text, is productive

of a new form of judgment, one that does not reproduce the same moral order. This takes

the form of a "useless" judgment. When Lord Henry claims he wishes to change nothing

in England but the "weather," this is the same as the portrait, returned to its original form,

hanging over Dorian's body at the novel's end: neither is a judgment with a use, but

rather a judgment of a work of art that produces nothing in the work of art. Lord Henry

cannot change the weather, and the portrait's changes do not help or affect Dorian in any

way. Thus we see the answer to Deleuze's question of what the "refusal of work" would

look like. Art is "quite useless" in that it is both extremely removed from any and all

spheres concerned with moral order, and also fairly indifferent to this fact and Dorian's

concern with maintaining a world organized by useful symbols.

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### **DEDICATION**

For the oh-so-patient and oh-so-beautiful love of my life, Sheri Gonzalez, my wonderful and occasionally annoying mother, father, and sisters Kim and Jenna....and my cat, JESUSBUDDHA. You all, one way or another (more often than not both one and the others), taught me that love is not a thing that has a reason behind it. It is just given, without question or (frequently) forethought to how horribly irrational and absurd certain gestures may seem....usually on my part.

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Without the English Department's faculty at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, none of this would have happened. To begin with, I wish to thank Dr. Ryan Netzley. There are many of my peers who are terrified of him, and there is a "good" reason for that: he is unsatisfied with anything but your best effort, and is frequently unsatisfied with even what you would call your own best effort, constantly pushing harder only to reaffirm to you that you do have an effort better than the previous one.

Dr. Betsy Dougherty was most helpful, both as a reader of the project and as an instructor, and she also always had her office door open to discuss whatever book I was currently reading or life in general. She also consistently does her best to remind me that the field of Irish Studies is, as it should be, a close-knit and hospitable family.

Dr. Michael Molino, even as chair of the department, can find time both to read drafts, as well as talk about Wilde or Joyce whenever anyone drops by his office.

I wish to thank Dr. Scott McEathron for his perpetual guidance. Dr. Edward Brunner, aside from always having time to discuss an author he does not even really care for, also taught me one of the most important aspects of teaching: listen to your student, and make sure you understand them before responding.

All of my fellow graduate students deserve acknowledgment for listening to me talk about this project for over a year.

I also wish to thank Dr. Ellen Crowell at Saint Louis University for beginning my career of talking about an author who loves infuriating people.

And of course, thanks to Oscar as well.

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#### INTRODUCTION

Art has no influence upon action. It annihilates the desire to act.<sup>1</sup>

Criticism of Oscar Wilde's work tends to resort to discussions of Wilde himself. His only novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray, is no exception: the famous preface to the 1891 publication was added by Wilde after the public's response to the novel as a serial in Lippincott's. Wilde's wife Constance famously guipped, "Since Oscar wrote Dorian Gray, no one will speak to us," and these hostile reactions seem incredibly important in discussing a novel that was originally regarded as "immoral," yet apparently also has a "terrible moral," as the author himself mentions (*Letters* 430-31). Many of these intentionalist arguments utilize admissions Wilde made in letters or criticism from his contemporaries; the charge that the book is "flawed in its construction," according to Jonathan Fryer, is due to Wilde's own admission that he "was incapable of sustaining descriptive prose" (62). Richard Haslam cannot reconcile the novel's gothic and therefore "poisonous" tendencies with its aesthetically "perfect" ones, claiming the gothic "colonized the plot" in relation to the "terrible moral" referenced above ("Gothic Modes" 310, 307). Thus the novel contains a "moral" for Haslam, but only insofar as Wilde himself says. Melissa Knox claims that "biographical scrutiny remains indispensible," which is a contradiction of another claim on the same page, "What seems to annoy contemporary literary critics committed to particular ideologies is that Wilde had none" (xi).

These intentionalist readings often also revert to other sayings of Wilde's, but in the end ask us to study the artist and not his art. Several biographers and critics, for

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray and Three Stories*, New York, NY: Signet Classics, 1995. 229. Print.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> See "Dorian Repudiated" in Ellmann's Oscar Wilde, pp. 314-25.

example, cite Wilde's claim, "Basil Hallward is what I think I am: Lord Henry what the world thinks me: Dorian what I would like to be – in other ages, perhaps" (*Letters* 585). This admission, in the end, amounts to very little. The Wilde of that letter (February 12, 1894, to one Ralph Payne) differs greatly from the Wilde who told the *Scots Observer* on July 9, 1890, that to "confuse the artist with his subject-matter," the "subject-matter" being "Virtue and wickedness," is an "absolutely unpardonable crime" (439). Such discrepancies as this could show that Wilde writes to newspaper editors differently than to friends and acquaintances, but these letters do not elucidate anything in regards to the novel itself. An intentionalist reading of Wilde will always produce different and contradictory results, because Wilde himself was constantly changing his mind. The Wilde of 1894 who draws parallels between himself and his fictions will not produce the same reading as the Wilde who has nothing to do with his "subject-matter" and the characters who explore said subject-matter.

The preface, which to some extent authorizes intentionalist readings, is not only designed to scare away hostile book reviews in 1891 and "defend" against charges of immorality.<sup>3</sup> The aphorisms relate to the narrative structure of the novel and how the ending unfolds. The preface makes the claim, "All art is quite useless." Yet the novel then begins with human characters, Lord Henry, Basil, and Dorian, engrossed in a multiplicity of discussions related to morality and desire (19-47). Before Lord Henry meets Dorian, Basil urges the man who "never say[s] a moral thing, and…never do[es] a wrong thing" not to "spoil" the young man (22, 31). Yet Lord Henry promptly does so:

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Both Barbara Belford and Richard Ellmann's biographies, for example, fold the preface into authorial intent, whether in Belford's claim that the epigrams were somehow "useful" in relation to "defend[ing] *Dorian Gray*'s morality in court" (173), or Ellmann introducing the preface as specifically "a result of the initial response" (322). This is not a criticism of these biographers' work, but a simple mention of how little this says of the preface's relationship to the narrative.

People are afraid of themselves nowadays. They have forgotten the highest of all duties, the duty that one owes to one's self. Of course, they are charitable. They feed the hungry and clothe the beggar. But their own souls starve, and are naked...The terror of society, which is the basis of morals, the terror of God, which is the secret of religion – these are the two things that govern us (35).

Lord Henry advocates some sort of "new Hedonism," whereby a person would "yield" to what is normally referred to as temptation, rather than "Resist" it (39, 35). Instead of always repressing one's desires and giving into the "terrors" of "God" and "society," one should realize "one's self," and should do this by following their desires unhindered. Lord Henry instructs Dorian to undo or overthrow the moral order of resistance to temptation and asceticism, and replace it with hedonism, exclaiming, "Live the wonderful life that is in you!" (39).

The story first appears to be a revolution of desire, of a "new Hedonism" and an undoing of Victorian values while exploring the "spiritual mysteries" the "senses" can "reveal" (147). This project then ends with the principal character dead and a painting that may temporarily have shown the "corruption" of Dorian's soul, but was only the visual image of morality, as it returns to showing its own "exquisite youth and beauty"; all of the "sins" it was showing fall away (142, 235). The visual image the painting reveals can be, and is, misread by Dorian as symbol of judgment, in the Deleuzian-Nietzschean sense. <sup>4</sup> The portrait is symbolic to Dorian in that he views the aesthetic

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Judgment is meant in the Deleuzian-Nietzschean sense of a creditor-debtor relationship in "To Have Done with Judgment" from *Essays: Critical and Clinical*, pp. 126-35. A creditor-as-transcendence is always owed payment by the debtor, yet the debt is both "*infinite* and thus unpayable" (126). Though the exact terminology of "creditor-debtor" does not immediately apply, what does is the concept of a use Dorian

object as standing in for judgment; quite literally, Dorian views his own painted image as a symbol representative of something it is not. It is an image of his aging, but is not the aging of his soul through any punitive judgment. In his viewing of the work as symbolic of judgment and thus also as symbolic of a revolution guided by that judgment, Dorian incorrectly feels guided by the canvas. The work of art, unlike Lord Henry's urging in the epigraph above, prompts Dorian mistakenly to action. In constantly reading the portrait as symbolic of judgment, looking at his own aging image as an object that somehow also admonishes him for his actions, he repeatedly ascribes a "use" of some kind to the object, a "use" that always folds the portrait back into part of a larger moral order, as judge of his actions. Dorian will not understand the painted image as "quite useless," but always instead as the scowl of some form of judge.

Dorian thus shows, if not the impossibility, at least the extreme difficulty, of viewing any aesthetic object as useless; if it were possible, he likely would not have unintentionally stabbed himself, much less read the various other messages into the painting. Yet none of Dorian's mistakes mar the portrait or affect art in any way, including a violent attack on the work of art. In other words, art here is treated as a visible symbol of revolution for Dorian, prompting him to action toward moral order. The portrait was never actually conscience or actually God to Dorian, never had a moment where it became transcendent morality. When Dorian wishes to trade his soul with the portrait, he misunderstands that the portrait shows what look like the changes of his soul, a very different thing from actually being his soul. Rather Dorian invests the

imagines the portrait has; the growing blood stain leads Dorian to believe he must use the portrait as a prompt to action and destroy the object. It is only in the action that the reader finds the use was not there to begin with.

portrait with this meaning himself, misguidedly viewing the aging of his own face on a canvas as his soul.

Dorian sees the image, believes it is his judge, and he either owes the painting some payment or atonement for "sins" committed, or must instead avoid the image. Right before he stabs the portrait, for instance, Dorian sees that the painting altered further, showing an image "more loathsome, if possible, than before," and the blood stain on the hand that stabbed Basil had grown, dripping "on the painted feet…blood even on the hand that had not held the knife" (233). The conclusion Dorian draws from this visual image is that it is not just an image; it is a symbol he reads as showing his conscience and sins, leading him to several conclusions. The visual image is a symbol of conscience, and he therefore has no choice but to "Confess," otherwise the blood stain will grow to cover his entire soul, or to destroy the painting. He chooses the latter.

This choice results in Dorian's death. Lord Henry means what he says about art "annihilat[ing] the desire to act": Dorian's action, as a result of how he mistakenly reads symbol as "useful" in producing moral order, does not actually produce these desired results. Right before the accidental shooting of James Vane, Lord Henry remarks that any attempt to read symbol in art, or anything else, as leading to action, ends in futility: "Destiny does not send us heralds," as "She is too wise or too cruel for that" (215). The visual image does not produce something, such as "revealing" to one his/her "destiny." One does not produce conclusions from a symbol as Dorian attempts to. When the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> See Michael Molino's "Narrator/Voice in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: A Question of Consistency, Control, and Perspective" in *Journal of Irish Literature*, 20. 3 (1991): *The Oscholars Library*, Online. Lord Henry is, in many ways, "much more consistent with the rhetorical pose" of the text than the narrator himself/herself is. Lord Henry is persistently offering up his "willful paradox" throughout the narrative, while the narrator vacillates between intruding on the text in Chapter Eleven, narrating with complete omniscience at the beginning, and "almost disappear[ing]" by the end.

preface makes the claim that art as "surface and symbol" is something the audience delves into "at their peril," this refers to the tendency to attempt to "use" the aesthetic object, to treat a painting (or book) as a chair or hammer. The ending shows that ascribing use to art obviously does not work, as the use was never there to begin with.

This futility of trying to find a "use" in art, of reading the visual image as a symbol leading to action, inherently links to the claim the novel makes about revolution. Admittedly, the use of the word "revolution" to refer to a novel about people talking might seem a bit of a stretch, yet this is exactly what Dorian tries to produce through art in his attempt to explore desire outside of judgment. This brand of revolution in the text, though admittedly facile, is one in which the difficulty of actually producing the new, being anything outside a circle of judgment which will endlessly reproduce itself, becomes apparent. This difficulty in producing the new is akin to Deleuze and Guattari's referencing the difficulty of imagining "a State of the 'refusal' of work" (*Plateaus* 472). In delusionally believing that art has a "use" and can work to produce some sort of new moral order, Dorian therefore works to produce, unsurprisingly reproducing the same order of judgment again. Dorian's work he believes he does with the portrait is caught up in producing some brand of hedonism, and unsurprisingly reproduces just another order of judgment, where the image he sees on the canvas judges him as "the judgment of God," which constitutes "the infinite form" of judgment, both for Deleuze and Dorian (Essays 129). This "infinite form," as a capitalist configuration of judgment, blocks production of the new: as long as Dorian works to undo one moral order and replace it with another, then the infinite form of capitalist judgment will always reproduce itself. In working to appease the judgment he sees in the portrait, Dorian endlessly reproduces the

same. In endlessly reproducing the same, the faulty model for revolution, both in the novel and in Deleuze, becomes apparent. Dorian continuously works to reproduce the same moral order of judgment in the portrait as the moral order Lord Henry references in "God" or "society."

The form of judgment is infinite in relation to capitalism when thought of as an "account." For Deleuze, judgment is such that "we are no longer able to pay off an account that has become infinite" (*Essays* 128). As long as Dorian looks at the portrait as in some way approving or disapproving of his actions, he will never actually reach a point where the image will be completely appeased; he can never "pay off [the] account" and cause the image to smile on him in some "ideal" configuration where he has successfully atoned for all sins he has ever committed. If the portrait is taken to be akin to "the judgment of God" by at least showing how this judgment mars the canvas, then the use Dorian believes he sees in the image is both one that does not have this use while also infinitely understood by Dorian in this way. The portrait ultimately is not marred by any form of judgment, though Dorian also could endlessly reproduce the same way of looking at the image.

This is not to claim that the text presents a utopian brand of revolution that Dorian should have been following all along. The revolution Dorian attempts would not have ever succeeded in producing the new. In the novel, this circle of infinite judgment reproduces the same while purportedly producing the new: all Dorian has to do is overthrow one moral order, Victorian thought, and replace it with a new moral order, hedonism. Yet Dorian does not actually overthrow the order of judgment; the portrait recreates for him "what holiness is to some, and conscience to others, and the fear of God

to us all" (110). For Dorian, and all other characters in the novel, revolution is understood as replacing one moral order with another, with still having a moral order to act as judge over one's actions. Moral order is the order that always produces the same in the novel, whether religion, the painting, or anything else; judgment is the mechanism of production and reproduction. Judgment, ultimately, is the use value expected from art (or any object that is expected to produce), whether this is "conscience," "the fear of God," or any other form of transcendence. Production is what Dorian thinks happens with use; reproduction is what actually happens. His expectations of production are seen largely in his relationship with the portrait: Dorian does not just expect art to be useful as a pseudonew moral order, as the completion of a revolution. He also expects art to be his judge once he begins to see the changes on the canvas. Art can quite easily be called judge, read as a symbol of transcendent judge by the spectator, even if the aesthetic object does not have this use.

The uselessness of art in the text is its lack of use as judge, and by extension, perhaps surprisingly its ability to produce the new. Though Dorian seems to explore this "new Hedonism" as a different way to understand desire and explore his "senses," in the end it is shown that all he accomplished is an attempt to defer moral order to the portrait, while continuing to view moral order as an infinite form of judgment. The portrait reflects his sins, causing him to react in one of three ways: to "hide his soul from the eyes of men," though he becomes paranoid wanting to make sure that "He himself would not see it," nor anyone else (135-36); consider himself a "sinner" while also feeling beholden to the object, loathing "to be separated from the picture that was such a part of his life" (154); or lash out violently at it (235). All of these occur while viewing the painting as

judge and himself as criminal. In all three respects, whether he hides from it, is beholden to it, or hates it violently, he still views it as judge. Not wishing to see it confirms the use he falsely believes the object has just as much as when he feels he must "atone" for something, or attack to destroy what he misreads as symbol with a use. All of these possibilities ultimately ascribe the same use to the object.

The "useful" thing for Wilde's novel is a form of moral order that inevitably works into this very configuration of judgment. For Deleuze and Guattari, revolution in a capitalist system is impossible, because revolution will always already become part of the capitalist engine, as well: "As long as the working class defines itself by an acquired status, or even by a theoretically conquered State, it appears only as 'capital,' a part of capital (variable capital), and does not leave the plan(e) of capital' (Plateaus 472). Any and all attempts to overthrow an existing order and replace it with a "new Hedonism" or any other order will always end in producing, at best, more of the same system.<sup>6</sup> An "acquired status" is one whereby the working class attempts to work to overthrow one order and acquire a new order, "conquering" one State only to replace it with another State, still configured on the "plan(e) of capital." Dorian continuously works to undo a preexisting moral order to attempt to create what he erroneously assumes will be a new order, which is why it is unsurprising that he reproduces the same in continuously looking at the portrait as if it judges him. This work to "acquire" a status is a problem from the outset. The "work" of revolution always folds revolution back into the same configuration of a capitalist State, with Dorian always looking at the portrait as his judge, as having a use. The only way for revolution to produce anything new is by "smashing

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Claiming that "table-talk" is akin to revolution in Victorian England is not exactly a stretch; see Lucy McDiarmid's "Oscar Wilde, Lady Gregory, and Late-Victorian Table-Talk" in *Oscar Wilde and Modern Culture*, Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2008. 46-62.

capitalism, of redefining socialism" for Deleuze, though this is not the answer for the novel per se (*Plateaus* 472). The answer is to reconfigure judgment in a way that renders it useless. Judgment in and of itself is not the problem; there is a way to judge and not reproduce anything. Reproduction of the same is the enemy, and use is how this occurs. Dorian believes the portrait has a use and can be viewed as his soul, therefore confirming some form of moral order. This "use," even if the portrait does not actually possess the use, is how Dorian reproduces the same. Judgment is the mechanism whereby Dorian does this; the image is judging him, and he must act to appease his judge. Lord Henry's judgment, on the other hand, does none of this.

The aphorism, the saying that does not enter into any "useful" configuration, answers the question of how to produce the new. In short, the answer is not a political one, but a literary one, even in the preface's function with the rest of the text: "All art is quite useless" means that the portrait's clear lack of use in the end should be no surprise. After watching Dorian "work" to consistently see if he can understand the exact same form of judgment in some new light, the preface is quietly reconfirmed.

In this way, the Wildean aphorism is the form art takes that will not be misinterpreted and used as a symbol the same way Dorian's portrait is. The portrait may not have the use Dorian believes it does, but he still attempts to use it in some fashion. The Wildean aphorism serves no purpose because it passes an entirely different and new aesthetic judgment, not capable of folding into any larger dialectic of moral order. "All art is quite useless," as an aphorism, is a new form of judgment with art that in no way implies any brand of symbol that could potentially serve a larger moral purpose.

The word "quite," as a qualifier potentially meaning either "fairly" or "extremely," seems to situate art's uselessness at opposite ends of a spectrum, however. Art is therefore only useless in that it is "extremely" useless and cannot have a use, or it is only "fairly" useless, and does not inherently have a use, though Dorian could attempt to act as if it does. Yet in this distinction between both what the aesthetic object actually is and in how Dorian attempts to treat the object, "quite" is shown to mean both "extremely" and "fairly." The portrait is "quite useless" in that it is physically not beholden to judgment and is removed from judgment and reproduction of the same in an "extreme" fashion, but it is largely only seen by Dorian to be "fairly" useless. There is no moment where the portrait waves a red flag of any sort in Dorian's face, "extremely" declaring that the aesthetic object does not have the use he believes it does. Dorian can still try to force the object to have a use.

The preface can be read into the overall narrative whole of the text, and should. The preface really answers two questions: one, it explains what "true revolution" would look like for Deleuze (and Guattari). The aesthetic object serves this purpose, is an object very literally exterior to the concerns of the State. How the State functions, or even how an individual person functions, even to the extent of physical violence, has no bearing on the aesthetic object. The other, more important question this answers is how the aesthetic object, particularly the literary object represented in the text as the Wildean aphorism, maintains a distinction that keeps the literary object separate from the State and its citizens. Lord Henry, the character in the text who frequently utters a Wildean aphorism, shows this distinction quite clearly at a luncheon. In discussing politics and

the "grave responsibilities" all of the guests present have, Lord Henry replies, "I don't desire to change anything in England except the weather" (57). This statement should be read as literally as possible: the literary aphorism, the wish to "change" the "weather," is completely directed away from any notion of moral order, or judgment that produces sameness, and is thus a "useless" statement that does not produce. A change in the weather caused by Lord Henry is both impossible unless a literary object could actualize the impossible (like the way the novel itself actualizes the seemingly impossible by making a portrait change shape), and also reproduces no moral order in any form. Yes, it is a judgment in some sense; Lord Henry is admitting a dislike for the weather. Yet as a judgment, this does not reproduce anything, or change anything about England, either its government or its people. Thus the Wildean aphorism in the form of the literary object is "quite useless" in that it is completely separate from anything can be used to reproduce the same. The literary object therefore needs to be approached and understood in this manner, as not reproducing any part of the State.

Yet this key problem, how to read the preface with the novel, is often overlooked for other purposes. This may be accounted for by the temptation to read intentionality into the text. Wilde is, after all, a fascinating figure. There have been a few attempts to produce an Irish Studies reading of the novel, as its author himself was Irish. Wilde's mockery of British high society is a frequent way to read a brand of Irish nationalism in *Dorian Gray*. Mary King's essay, "Typing *Dorian Gray*: Wilde and the Interpellated Text," argues that the novel may be "read as Celticist in its preoccupation with origins and types," as well as "modernist in its ironic deconstruction of master narratives of imperialism and identity" (2). King explicates these elements quite thoroughly, insisting,

for instance, that Lord Henry's "prob[ing]" of Dorian's "matrilineal line" and finding a nameless father with a Margaret *Devereux*, maintains the fact that "Celts were typically feminine," and that "Devereux" was the last name of a sixteenth-century Earl of Essex who "was defeated in Ireland by...Earl Hugh O'Neill" (3, 4). King calls the novel a "deconstruction of imperialist-nationalist narratives," but many of the analogies she draws between elements of Wilde's text and Celtic mythology or history seem an odd fit: King asserts, for instance, that when James Vane is killed, the "Celt as degenerate child of nature" is killed (8). James is an "emigrant-sailor" to King, yet Wilde's novel rarely mentions anything about the Vanes' family history. Perhaps Wilde is mocking the "collusive racism" of the colonizer's "narratives" by introducing James as "thick-set" and "clumsy in movement," or Irish simply in that he dislikes London, yet he can just as easily be read as a side character (King 8, *Dorian Gray* 78).

Roger Platizky similarly feels that the objects Dorian collects, along with his portrait, are actually an argument about colonialism and imperialism. Platizky's argument shows the characteristic reading of Wilde with Dorian, or essentially reading the novel as if Dorian were Wilde himself. Platizky claims that as the portrait becomes more and more hideous, the other objects Dorian collects "deteriorate from rare gems...to a pantheon of historical tyrants and Renaissance revenge figures that poison their victims or nations" (Platizky 2). Dorian's idolatry of the portrait and collection of rare and fine objects are what Platizky defines as "obsession," as well as "compulsive."

This reading of the novel ties Dorian's desires for collecting objects into an Irish nationalist reading of Wilde's own ethos. Platizky not only mentions Wilde's Irish nationalist mother, Speranza, but also highlights Wilde's support of Irish Home Rule and

his opposition to "British subjugation of Irish culture and arts" (2). Platizky appropriates Declan Kiberd's reading that this collection of objects is Wilde acting "both the role of the colonizer...and the colonized" to present the author as a cultural figure who can be read into his own work (Platizky 3): Wilde is the colonizer in that he is the "urbane, epigrammatic Englishman" and the colonized in that he is the "subversive writer who subjects to scorn and radical critique the British imperial attitudes he ironically mimics" (3).

Many of these readings are discourses about celebrity and popular culture. Ellen Crowell calls Wilde's persona during his tour of America an "over-the-top parody of aristocratic privilege," and claims that Wilde's "distinctive dandyism" was his way of "using mimicry to expose as fluid those national, racial, and sexual identities upon whose fixity colonial power structures depended" (Crowell). In other words, Wilde's public image was part of his art, and part of how he deconstructed "colonial power structures" simply in how he would sit for a photograph. Wilde's social persona was certainly excessive. Shelton Waldrep calls Wilde's image a "mask," and the novel is Wilde's attempt to "try on different masks" (Self-Invention 17). By "different masks" Waldrep means that each of the three main characters (Dorian, Basil, and Lord Henry) "reflect aspects of Wilde's own public persona." According to Waldrep, Dorian is, in essence, his portrait's mask, disguising "a soul in trouble" (Self-Invention 19). John Sloan ties the concept of the mask back to Wilde's public performance, arguing that Wilde "led the way artistically in England" for Ireland, through the "paradox, insincerity, and the selfconscious artifice of the mask" (84). Wilde's "dramatic" mask allows him to "inhabit different selves and realities at will" (84). In other words, Wilde's extravagant sense of

dress was not all-for-naught: Wilde's public persona was one used to "mock" the English aristocracy, while at the same time exploring different "selves and realities" whenever they suited him.

The concept of "masks" in these discussions helps Wilde's work remain elusive. Though it may elucidate Wilde himself as a cultural figure of import, this sort of criticism asks and answers questions more about the author than the novel. King's article, for example, along with her other essay on Darwinism in *Dorian Gray*, do not take the preface of the novel into account.<sup>7</sup> The problem is that the novel does not directly argue anything about Ireland. The preface begins by discussing art, which is much more the central focus of the text. None of this prevents an Irish Studies reading of Wilde himself. A strong Nationalist thread runs throughout his biography, and Wilde is certainly a cultural icon.<sup>8</sup>

Irish Studies readings frequently could be grouped with postcolonial readings of other Victorian texts. Once again Waldrep, in placing the work at the end of the Victorian era, compares the novel with Stoker's *Dracula*, as it shows England as "infected with otherness" that is no longer "racial" but "based on blood" ("Gray Zones" 55). In other words, the end of the Victorian era is marked by infection; Dorian's opium dens, Waldrep claims, are "ultimately parallel to the oriental as Edward Said has defined it" in that they are "zone[s] for containing uncouth appetites," pushed to the outer regions of the empire.

<sup>7</sup> See "Digging for Darwin" from *Irish Studies Review* 12.3 Dec. 2004, p. 315-27.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Ellmann references his interview given to friend Robert Ross for the *Pall Mall Budget*, in which he castigates England and the possibility that his play *Salome* may be censored, stating that he will move to France, and more importantly, "I am not English. *I am Irish which is quite another thing*" (372, my emphasis).

These "infections" also function as the way the novel presents "desire." While the text can be read as showing some sort of "awakening of desire," and consequently the failings of this awakening, this once again does not take the preface of the work into account. In Forbes Morlock's article "That Strange Interest in Trivial Things," the garden scene where Lord Henry "deflowers" Dorian is the young man's "entry into desire" (71). Morlock argues that this opening scene is an awakening of desire, a "seduction" both of Dorian and of the reader (72). Of course, the metaphor of the bee pollinating the flower while Lord Henry pollinates Dorian's ear with his words is sexual in nature, just as Morlock affirms. What desires exactly are being aroused are desires of what Lord Henry says the soul makes "monstrous and unlawful," or "forbidden." This awakening is a resuscitation of these characters that are likely close to slipping into respective comas; Jeff Nunokawa finds desire and boredom to be inextricably linked in Wilde's novel. Ennui essentially envelops desire, being both a "period of waiting for desire" and "the dull hangover that comes after 'nights of...misshapen joy" (Nunokawa 74). If we are to take Nunokawa's reading at face-value, then the scene Morlock calls "the first articulation of its [the novel's] young hero's desire" makes the rest of the novel a lengthy study in the ennui that surrounds desire (Morlock 71).

Certainly Nunokawa shows that the text supports such a reading, simply in his listing of how often someone is...well, bored in the novel. Yet boredom is not all there is; Nunokawa claims the novel is Wilde's portrayal of "the ruined body of homosexual desire," and the aging of the body is what causes desire, or the "passions," to "tire" (89, 88). Nunokawa recalls the scene where Basil, here the "subject" desiring Dorian's body, views the painting: "An exclamation of horror" comes across his face, though this

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> See *Tame Passions of Wilde*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003, print, p. 72.

Nunokawa claims. Basil is also horrified by seeing the portrait as "some foul parody, some infamous ignoble satire" (*Dorian Gray* 168). Basil's reaction stems from the "idea" that "was monstrous" that his own work had altered into such a hideous state; merely viewing an aging image of Dorian does not seem to be all that terrified him. The artist seems more horrified of God, feeling that he and Dorian "are both punished" for their desires (*Dorian Gray* 170).

A queer studies reading like Nunokawa's stems from the obvious fact that homosexual desire, and more broadly sexual desire, is the specific engine driving a large part of the novel. Ed Cohen believes the text "problematizes representation per se" of "male homosexuality as 'unnameable'" and thus creates "one of the most lasting icons" of homosexual desire (811). Henry M. Alley argues that Basil himself is actually the "tragic hero" of the novel, where Basil's "tragedy" is "his inability to bring his love [of Dorian] into the context of his contemporary society" (4). Basil's "inner homophobia," as Alley calls it, is what makes him think of his love for Dorian as "taboo" (2, 4). This reading pushes Basil to the forefront of the text, at the expense of both Dorian and the portrait, as well as yet another reading of Wilde himself, paralleling Basil with the author by yet again referencing Wilde's claim that Hallward is "what I think I am" (3).

Barri J. Gold's "The Domination of *Dorian Gray*" focuses on the controlling way in which various sexual relations in the novel are ordered: they "seem to cut across lines of gender" (28). Sibyl wishes to be dominated by Dorian, which can be seen in her exclamation that her acting will be "for his delight," and that she is "poor beside him" (*Dorian Gray* 83). Dorian will sit and have someone perform to please him, and will

also be her "Prince Charming" to rescue her from abject poverty. The reason Gold finds that dominance takes precedence over sexual orientation is because men do not just dominate women in the text. Lord Henry perpetually seeks to "dominate" the young man, and reads into many of Dorian's actions his own dominance (*Dorian Gray* 53). Upon learning of Dorian's heterosexual love for Sibyl as opposed to a homosexual love for himself, Lord Henry does not feel "the slightest pang of annoyance or jealousy," and is actually "pleased by it" (*Dorian Gray* 73). Lord Henry believes that "it was through certain words of his…that Dorian Gray's soul had turned to this white girl and bowed in worship before her."

Esther Rashkin views the theme of control as something that pervades the text "from the outset," only in the form of child abuse. Both Basil and Lord Henry seek to dominate Dorian, the latter in a way already mentioned, and the former in attempting to "protect" Dorian from Lord Henry's "very bad influence" (69). Dorian's abuse as a child stems from his grandfather:

The connection Dorian establishes between the hideous portrait and his hateful grandfather implies that the vile, corrupt existence he leads and sees represented in the painting was in some sense cast upon him by his grandfather, just as the grandfather's purple coverlet is cast upon the pictorial image of Dorian's life (71).

Thus Dorian's "sins" are simply a retread of his abuse by his grandfather; his "vile, corrupt existence" and actions are his fate, overpowering Dorian before the text begins. Dorian's domination of Sibyl and murder of Basil are thus reactions against his abuse (75-8). In the end, even the work of art asserts this abusive dominance over its subject.

The painting is "cast upon" Dorian by his grandfather, just as Victorian repression of homosexuality is cast upon Wilde himself, and thus his text (79-80).

Though Rashkin differs from Gold in stating that this abuse that dominates Dorian is not in nature sexual, and also in that dominance from child abuse prefigures Dorian's character in some fashion, both of these readings allow that dominance is a thread that can be traced throughout (72). Dorian's inability to escape the abuse of his grandfather is also his inability to view the portrait as truly useless. Rashkin's reading is particularly interesting in this light; the portrait as symbolic of child abuse is something Dorian could not possibly understand as merely a useless object, much the way I argue that the portrait becomes moral arbiter for Dorian in a way he is unable to escape. Dorian of course would never view the painting as just an image if it reminds him of being sexually or physically abused; this is most definitely a use for the portrait that he would not escape. In his constantly reading the image of himself aging as symbol of judgment and thus consistently feeling the need to either hide, confess, or destroy, Dorian fails to ever view the image itself as just that: an image.

As already mentioned, however, many readings tend not to focus on the preface and its relation to the narrative structure of the novel. The preface does not contradict the work at points as Ellmann states, but explicates the relationship Dorian has with the portrait and art in general. The preface defines the aesthetic object as "useless" in its failure to reproduce moral order, using a form of judgment that prompts work as an engine. In "The Decay of Lying," Wilde claims that "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life" (*Intentions* 31). This theory reverses what Wilde feels is the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Ellmann parenthetically remarks, "But Dorian is corrupted by a book" in reference to the line, "There is no such thing as a moral or immoral book" (322).

simultaneously incorrect yet popular way of viewing art: the nineteenth century is to him the "dullest and most prosaic century possible," and any mode of realism is misguided, because "No great artist ever sees things as they really are" (28, 26). Great art is instead what creates life, as "A great artist invents a type, and Life tries to copy it" (18). This lie, or display of "things as they are not," is central to understanding his only novel. The real main character of Wilde's novel is the first noun in the title: *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The novel begins and ends with art. Yet aside from starting and ending by viewing a work of art, the novel also explicates how art is something one traditionally uses; Dorian's actions are thus no surprise, and he does exactly what he was supposed to do. Even nature copies art; the "glorious sky" Vivian is told to look at one moment is something he views as really "a very second-rate Turner...with all the painter's worst faults exaggerated and over-emphasized" (Intentions 24). 11 The world around oneself is filled with aesthetic objects that are then used to produce some effect in the real world that in no way measures up to the original work of art. Hence the ending to the essay, where lying is the solution, as "the telling of beautiful untrue things" is both a work of art, removed from judgment and moral order, and a creation of something new (30). This lie is both outside of the realm of law or morality, and also reveals a completely new "beautiful" form that the world around it will inevitably copy. Yet art can, and often will, be used incorrectly to produce the same repeatedly. As a matter of fact, that is the tendency of even an evening sky, much less the tendency of Dorian Gray with the portrait. It is just the case that art itself does not do this. Art as a completely new

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Wilde's major critical essays, such as "The Decay of Lying" or "The Critic as Artist," are frequently staged as dialogues, quite Socratic in nature, where one character essentially teaches the other character how to properly view art. In "Lying," Vivian is the one doing the teaching; Cyril asks the questions and does the learning.

creation, whether it be a Turner or a Hallward, is unconcerned with whether or not someone tries to use it and reproduces the effect incorrectly. It is "extremely" useless in that Dorian will find the aesthetic object does not produce what he expected, and it is "fairly" useless in that it has no interest either way in what Dorian tries to do with it.

To return to the novel's structure, this beginning and ending of the text serve to undercut the narrative throughout. All of Lord Henry's aphorisms seemingly designed to cause both Dorian and the audience to consider a new brand of order with which to replace the old one, as well as Dorian's attempts to seek this new order in his own life, end in failure. In other words, Dorian's attempt to undo an existing order fails, because he reproduces the same order, while Lord Henry's words prove to be exactly what he thinks: an "arrow" he had "merely shot" "into the air" (36). The only "mark" they hit is Dorian, and Dorian proves to accomplish little (if anything) of what the words instruct him to achieve. He perhaps "yield[s]" to temptation, but ultimately is still "Resist[ing] it" in his use of the portrait as reproduction of moral order. His various sexual desires, for instance, though only mentioned by Basil as hearsay, are his yielding to the temptation of sleeping with various men and women (163). Yet these temptations are ultimately resisted, all for the sake of altering "the hideous thing that he had hidden away" (233).

This failure to produce a new order, however, shows a certain aesthetic success. Wilde's aesthetics is ahead of the characters' brands of revolution, even when the narrative appears to be about revolution and undoing existing orders in an effort to reconfigure desire as Lord Henry's brand of "new Hedonism" (39). When Dorian stands motionless for ten minutes pondering Lord Henry's speech, he muses on "Mere words," and "How terrible they were" (36). Part of the reason "mere words" are so terrible is

because, though they are "mere words," Dorian debates whether there is "anything so real as words?" For the novel itself, they are not real, nor can they be used in that sense.

They are "lies," as "The Decay of Lying" would argue, that do not fold into a production of judgment that recreates the same moral order. An arrow "merely shot" "into the air" is much more accurate. The arrow is completely off-the-mark. The fact that it hit Dorian is not what the words were themselves intending; his attempt to use words does not reveal the words themselves as "useful."

The narrative in the text appears to be undercut so frequently that only "mere words" remain. This in and of itself is something Wilde tried in his first book of poetry: Florina Tufescu characterizes the first, "political" section as poetry which reduces historical event to something "unrecognizable, transformed into musical and visual harmonies" (50). Wilde's prose takes this one step further, rendering narrative as the narrative of uselessness, where action in the form of revolution or judgment is always for naught. Action is working to reproduce the same, though one thinks he/she produces something new. Yet art does not produce, or reproduce, any of the same. The preface doubles this effect by giving away the ending on the first page (or two); the reader is not and should not be surprised when art ends up being "quite useless." The preface then, in relation to the narrative structure of the text, is not just a series of witty aphorisms from the King of Witty Aphorisms, but is essential to showing the uselessness of art. If removed from the text, the narrative by itself would largely seem to do the opposite and reproduce more of Lord Henry's resistance to temptation. Dorian cannot use the portrait as judge, yet he also cannot view it as anything besides judge, and therefore his frequent attempts at misguided use are no surprise. The portrait does not symbolize anything that

can work as part of a moral order, is not "standing in" for something else that it only signifies. It is rather the visual image of the aging of Dorian's soul; not the visible symbol of revolution. The very problem with symbol for Wilde is it removes one from the work too far. In the chain of art as symbolic of judgment, as opposed to a visual image of an aging body or soul, one sees the work of art as being asked to show something it does not already show. A visual image of Dorian just shows the image; a painting being read as symbol for something other than what is being shown creates an unnecessary distance between the object and the spectator. More importantly, the tendency for Dorian is to use the symbol versus experiencing a literary text. For Wilde there is a difference between using and experiencing the work. The problem of proliferating symbolism incorrectly, as already stated, is not solvable by Dorian; he could just look at the image as an image, and completely ignore what he formerly saw as judgment, but the text argues that this is largely impossible, at least with the portrait, the visual image so readily identified as the self.

#### REVOLUTION

Revolution in the novel is the reproduction of the same; there is no "utopian" or "ideal" moral order that *Dorian Gray* believes revolution can work toward. The characters in the text may understand revolution as working to overthrow one order and replace it with a new one, but the novel itself urges that this only reproduces the same moral order. The same is either what Lord Henry calls the "twin terrors" of religion and the state, and is reproduced by Dorian's viewing the portrait as prompting him to action. Any of these moral orders reproduce an endless cycle of action, always directed toward viewing one's actions as "sin," and thus perpetually having to act again to repent. The Wildean-Deleuzian use value an aesthetic object has shows that any belief that the object can be used to reproduce this moral order is delusional. The conceit of the novel, when coupled with the preface, is that Dorian can attempt to "use" the aesthetic object, represented by the portrait. However, the aesthetic object is "useless," does not actually have this use value. Even if Dorian assumes the use is there, that does not cause the portrait to actually begin guiding Dorian toward the proper course of action, or anything of the sort. The portrait does not "resist" this use value in any way, however; the work in no way acts toward shirking off a use Dorian tries to ascribe to it. Dorian misuses the portrait, but the lack of refusal from the work highlights the distinction between the realms of "Art" and "Life" Wilde mentions in "The Decay of Lying." Art does not act, does not do anything that could be interpreted as a use. Dorian constantly acts, but his actions are never refuted, save by his own hand in the final scene.

Revolution in the novel is reduced to willfully "sin[ning]" as "disobedience" (201). Yet unsurprisingly, this willful "disobedience" produces nothing but the same

moral order: even if Dorian is frequently and consciously trying to "sin," he still, and especially, views the actions as "sins." The portrait does not have a part in any of this throughout the novel; Dorian just believes it does. The "moral" that even the author himself references is often read as a direct contradiction to the line from the preface negating the existence of "moral or immoral" books, yet the apparent revolution occurring at the outset is not producing anything different or new. Religion and the state are Lord Henry's initial targets, yes, but not the targets of the novel itself: revolution cannot create the new as art can. Yet does the ending not *confirm* a scholar like Michael Buma's need for order to "preside" over desire and protect us from "temptations" (25)? Is the novel not really about our need for moral order?

The role of the portrait in the novel confirms the opposite: morality, even if imposed externally originally, is for all intents and purposes internal to the point of being nearly impossible to move away from. Sin is also not necessarily punished in either the case of Christianity or hedonism; the portrait, as the object supposedly revealing Dorian's sins to him, actually ends up completely unscathed and unpunished. Dorian cannot view the portrait as useless and cease turning what he views as symbolic of moral order into action. In fact, a reading like Michael Buma's of Christian orthodoxy is confirmed in the novel by viewing Dorian as the central character instead of the portrait. Instead of a novel that explores what truly useless art would look like, the novel "punishes" all forms of sin.

The "moral" Wilde claims to the *St. James' Gazette* is simply that "all excess, as well as all renunciation, brings its own punishment" (*Letters* 430). Buma interprets this claim as a "massive understatement of the novel's essentially orthodox morality" (19).

For Buma, this novel is "far more overtly Christian" than Wilde's statement from the letter allows. Aside from falling back on authorial intent, this misreads Wilde's own statement. The fact that both excess and renunciation bring their own "punishments" does not show a need for Christian morality. Wilde's exact words are as follows:

The painter, Basil Hallward, worshipping physical beauty far too much, as most painters do, dies by the hand of one in whose soul he has created a monstrous and absurd vanity. Dorian Gray, having led a life of mere sensation and pleasure, tries to kill conscience, and at that moment kills himself. Lord Henry Wotton seeks to be merely the spectator of life. He finds that those who reject the battle are more deeply wounded than those who take part in it (430).

The "monstrous and absurd vanity" Basil creates in his image of Dorian is the excess that kills him, as he adores it "far too much." Lord Henry's refusal of "the battle" of life is renunciation. Dorian both tries to live "a life of mere sensation and pleasure," and also "kill conscience" so as to feel free to continue this life; this is excess and renunciation. Dorian is excessive in his life of aimless sensual experiences, but renounces part of himself, his own soul. Excess, then, is an excess of any kind in life, whether it be "mere sensation and pleasure" or "worshipping physical beauty far too much." Renunciation is not Christian morality, the mistake Buma makes. He argues that Wilde's deathbed conversion to Roman Catholicism meant, "Perhaps the latently Christian moral…had finally begun to resonate with its author" (25). In other words, for Buma the Christian moral in the novel is confirmed by Wilde's biography later in life as well as letters he writes in its defense, not the text itself. The preface for Buma serves no larger purpose in

the text; it "obfuscate[s] the obvious orthodoxy of the novel's 'moral' conclusion," and serves a much larger purpose during Wilde's trial, though it fails there, too (24).

Unlike Buma, Anne Bruder argues that the text "denounces imitation as 'wrong'" (165). Imitation, much like the imitation Wilde references in "The Decay of Lying," is reproduction of the same, "Life imitate[ing] Art." Bruder argues that the text, along with Wilde's other writings from that time period, is not about "mirroring reality," but "artistic innovation as the driving force of society" (168, 165). The novel does not contain a portrait that replaces or "mirrors" morality. This "mirroring" is only happening in Dorian's eyes; the ending confirms that it was never actually there. Had it been, stabbing the portrait would have somehow resulted in killing the moral order Dorian tries to escape. Art is a failed model for either excess or renunciation, while also being the only "new" thing in society: Dorian clearly does not succeed in replacing an order of "renunciation" with Lord Henry's "Hedonism" by simply asking a portrait to do this for him, and his attempt at "excess" once again really just works to defer renunciation to a work of art. The portrait, on the other hand, does much more than reproduce the same. After an entire narrative of an "evil and aging face on the canvas," the portrait returns to its original beauty (142, 235). After "aging" so much, the portrait shows that it has actually done no such thing; the "evil and aging" on the "canvas" was just an image that the work of art revealed. When Basil sees both the "hideous face" he acknowledges the "expression" as one "that fill[s] him with disgust and loathing," caused by his belief that "Sin is a thing that writes itself across a man's face," and "cannot be concealed" (168, 162). However the portrait undoes this very distinction in its relationship to Dorian: sin does *not* write itself across one's face, but can be written across something *else*'s face,

and be promptly erased when the original decides he/she must be finished with sin. In short, art can simultaneously show one's sins while also being beyond any concept of the inscription of sin, of Nunokawa's hangover. Dorian explores an endless list of "passions" that are "past the homosexual, and the heterosexual as well," but also "other items on a shopping list as long and miscellaneous as the book itself" (Nunokawa 82-3). None of these passions are written on his face, at least until the end. The portrait shows the hangover, but also only "suspend[s] it temporarily" for Dorian (Nunokawa 87). It returns to him at the end, which aside from showing Nunokawa's "ruined body of homosexual desire," also shows art as capable of something quite new: the ability to age horribly, only to turn around and look youthful and beautiful again.

The problem with a reading like Buma's is that it ignores the role art plays in the novel. Claiming that Dorian's excesses are "punished" at the end ascribes action to the portrait, making the work of art a substitute for Christian theology, and not what the portrait actually is; a visual image that Dorian then reads as visible symbol and believes shows him moral order and how his actions are not in accord with said order. Rather than affirming humanity's need for order, this ending really shows the difficulty of moving away from it, and also the mistake of replacing it with art.

Buma's reading, and others like it, stem from a desire to read the novel as a work about Dorian and the moral dimensions of the human characters in the text. In fact all of the characters in the novel seem to divert attention from any discussion of art and steer us back to order. Lord Henry's speech in Basil's garden prompts Dorian's initial actions. His monologue leads the youth to reconfigure moral order incorrectly. Art is being

utilized by Dorian as a new, seemingly revolutionary vehicle for desire, misunderstanding what Lord Henry urges him to do at the outset of the novel:

The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden to itself, with *desire* for what its monstrous laws have made monstrous and unlawful (35, my emphasis).

Desire, as defined above, has been made "monstrous and unlawful" by the "twin terrors" of "God" and "society." Desire is configured as something from which order protects us, lest we should fall into "temptation." Lord Henry's soliloquy is aimed directly at Dorian: he urges that "what our century wants" is a "new Hedonism," and that Dorian could be the realization of this new Hedonistic revolution, deconstructing the very orders that make desire "monstrous and unlawful" (35-39). But instead, Dorian makes the portrait the visible symbol of this new hedonism by reading the aesthetic object as producing a symbol that prompts him to action. This makes the revolution one toward hedonism precisely because it inevitably produces the same; order still guides and controls desire, even if this new order is initially labeled the "cure" of "the soul" and "the senses" (37). The order becomes the portrait stashed in the attic. "Hedonism" becomes trying to hide from the portrait.

For Dorian's misguided revolution to take place, he must think the portrait has a *use*. Dorian explores bisexual desire for instance by ascribing a certain use to the portrait, that of deferred conscience. Basil has heard that Dorian is a man whom "no pure-minded girl should be allowed to know" and is "so fatal to young men," yet Basil feels quite strongly that Dorian is innocent, as "Sin is a thing that writes itself across a

man's face" (162-3). The trade-off is simple: Dorian's portrait has the "sin" written on it instead, and he himself can explore desire completely uninhibited by sin's inscription. Yet the use Dorian believes art has is never surmounted, nor would it be. His utilization of the work, his attempt to use the portrait to write his sins on, is also an attempt to use art to reproduce the same. In the novel, Dorian is not expected to produce the new, at any point. Use value is something art does not possess, and also something Dorian is destined to endlessly find in the world around him. Dorian agrees completely with Basil. As much as he tries to ignore the painter's urgings toward some sort of redemption, ultimately they both see sin as an inscription and the body of sin as having a use.

A hedonistic revolution seems to be where the novel heads at the beginning, when we see exactly how Dorian begins to use art as the new vehicle for desire. Dorian sees the portrait and desires to become an aesthetically beautiful object. First the portrait stuns him, with "his cheeks flushed" and "a look of joy" in his eyes (41). The painting arrests Dorian with a form of Christopher Craft's claim about self-identification when viewing the work of art; he feels he "had recognized himself for the first time" (41). 12

Dorian of course furthers this with the semi-Faustian pact he makes, wishing "the picture could change, and I could be always what I am now" (43). 13

Dorian takes Lord Henry's impetus as literally as possible in attempting to trade places with the work of art, desiring to be beautiful in the same way. He misunderstands the purpose of art, and the "as if" clause about self-recognition. Dorian removes the word "if" and recognizes the portrait as himself, as revealing something it does not. He then makes the desperate wish to give

<sup>12</sup> In his article "Come See About Me: The Enchantment of the Double in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*," Craft views the portrait as a mirror of sorts, as a "double" of Dorian, and even as a form of "image-theft" as if the portrait is stealing Dorian's identity (132).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> The difference between Dorian and Faust is that we never meet the devil in Wilde's novel, nor can we be certain *what* supernatural powers allow the switch to happen.

art a use, to turn the portrait into a revolutionary symbol. In saying he would "give [his] soul" to remain ageless while the portrait reflects the changes of his soul and body with the passage of time, Dorian asserts his belief that the portrait *can* have this use, can reveal to one the visual image of their own soul. Wilde actualizes the trade with the semi-Faustian pact as a gothic plot device. In order for Dorian's "wish" that the portrait have a use, the trade has to take place. Yet the problem with the wish is not realized fully until the end of the narrative. "The picture" can, and does, "change," but not in the way Dorian intended. Rather it just shows a changing visual image, something very much like a motion picture, as both Ronald Thomas and Emma Kafalenos argue. <sup>14</sup> Dorian, in a sense, misunderstands his own wish. A changing visual image is not one's soul.

Immediately following this wish for a trade with the work of art, the swap is actualized before any of the characters, and even the reader, are made aware of it. <sup>15</sup> Dorian begins to be undone *by* the work of art, begins to be consumed by symbol. Lord Henry calls the portrait "the real Dorian Gray," and Dorian recognizes the portrait as "part of" himself (43). Lord Henry's claim directly parallels portrait and sitter with the operative word in his enunciation being "is": "It is the real Dorian Gray" is not uncertain in any sense. Dorian's statement, on the other hand, references much more hazily the portrait being "part of" something, yet the portrait being "part of" Dorian is already the beginning of the portrait's investment with the responsibility of *being Dorian*, which ultimately extends to Dorian investing the portrait with his soul/conscience. A claim that the portrait is "part of" oneself begins an attempt to try and use the aesthetic object. The

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> For more on the moving visual image, see Emma Kafalenos' "The Power of Double Coding to Represent New Forms of Representation: *The Truman Show, Dorian Gray,* 'Blow-Up' and Whistler's Caprice in Purple and Gold." *Poetics Today,* 24. 1 (Spring 2003): 1-33. Online.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Dorian does not become aware of the change in the painting until the end of Chapter Seven, when he notes that "The expression looked different" (105).

hazy reference to the work of art being somehow related to oneself can easily be followed to the conclusion of allowing art to be symbol of one's soul. Lord Henry's assertion is true as well; he just does not know it yet, in the same way Dorian does not know that art is "quite useless" and cannot be a "soul" in any sense, just as he does not know the warning about symbol in the preface. To "read the symbol" is done at one's "peril" (18). Symbol is not impossible to somehow "do" in visual art; it is just incredibly difficult, as shown with Dorian's tendency. The symbol, the visual image whose gaze prompts him to action, Dorian should instead "read." Not act upon. The "peril" is the tendency to do more than "read" the symbol, to try and use it toward some end. To "read" would be the "useless" judgment aforementioned. When Lord Henry wishes to "change" the "weather" in England, this is a way to read without acting. The aphorism cannot be acted upon, can only be heard or "read" in a useless sense. Yet none of the luncheon guests take Lord Henry uselessly, as it were; the replies to his continued aphorisms are about one's "grave responsibilities," modified to "Terribly grave," while one of his other aphorisms is "A dangerous theory!" (57). Their tendency, much like Dorian's, is to act and thus use, not to read.

The difference between reading and acting upon symbol is the difference of use.

To read in the novel is to become "unconscious of the falling day and creeping shadows"

(139). When Dorian first becomes enamored with Lord Henry's little yellow book, he finds it impossible to set down, with time passing in a way he does not notice; he is "unconscious" of the world around him. Experiences that to him have never been actualized, that he had either "dimly dreamed" or "never dreamed," were both "revealed" in some fashion, removing Dorian from reality further. Reading, for Dorian, is a

"useless" pastime. Nothing about it can work to reproduce any part of the world around him. There is no work involved in reading, unlike the work involved in Dorian following Lord Henry's advice to become the "visible symbol" of hedonism. In Dorian becoming the visible symbol of a new moral order, there is work inherently in the statement "there is nothing you could not do" (39). To "do," to work toward becoming a visible symbol or creating a new moral order, is a use for Dorian. However the book in no way is used like this, and does not work toward anything. The intoxicating book completely removes him from the text while immersing him in it, reading with a "cruel joy" the main character's slow downfall (141). To "read" the symbol in the preface, then, is prescriptive: to read is to remain "unconscious of the falling day and creeping shadows," to direct oneself away from the world. Or, in fewer words, to read is not to act. To act, on the other hand, is what Dorian does with the portrait; see a "visible emblem" and acknowledge in it some directive prompting one to "resist temptation," as he ponders after he initially leaves Sibyl Vane. The gaze from the object, the "beautiful marred face and its cruel smile," become more than just this image. The image "was watching him," hence his reconsideration of his actions, albeit briefly.

To return to the conversation revolving around the newly-painted portrait, this scene also shows how words can be taken as "mere words," not leading toward action involving moral order. More noticeable than the other two characters' parallels or equivocations of the work of art and sitter is Basil's constantly referencing the portrait *as* the sitter, not in the same casual manner in which Lord Henry refers to *everything* throughout the novel, but with a direct characterization of Dorian as the work of art:

"Well, as soon as you are dry, you shall be varnished, and framed, and sent home," and "Then you can do what you like with yourself" (44). Basil may be merely joking here; this immediately follows his thanking Dorian for "appreciating my work at last" and immediately precedes his informing the sitter that "You know the picture is yours" (45). Yet Wilde prefigures the rest of the narrative and Dorian's new relationship with the portrait: the sitter's desire to become art and his verbal action on this desire are also when the physical trade takes place, and Dorian invests the portrait with a use it cannot fulfill. The subject of the portrait becoming the work of art takes place during this scene, and the three principal characters in the narrative allude to it. Dorian is to be viewed as a work of art, while the portrait is to be locked away in an attic to hide what Dorian understands as his aging "soul" from the rest of the world. The desires of everyone else in Dorian's world are rearranged, making the novel seem to be a revolution of desire that the participants are, at least initially, completely unaware of: Dorian will no longer worry that Basil likes his "art" more than his "friends," and Lord Henry's claim that youthful beauty is "higher" than "genius" since it "needs no explanation" will always be true for Dorian, though at the cost of slowly allowing the portrait to direct his actions in his identification with it (43, 38). He will never cease to be beautiful the way the portrait once was, yet will also constantly watch the portrait become him in its apparent aging. Not only does Dorian's desire to be "always young" utilize the portrait to actualize this wish, but it also reverses how Dorian will perceive his two friends, and their views on art (42). He believes that the painter himself will always love art and will tire of friends, while Lord Henry clearly states that the beauty of a work of art is higher than a person's genius; Dorian is now eternally beautiful in the same respect as Basil's "ivory Hermes"

and will never get his "first wrinkle" that he supposes will make Basil tire of him (43). Dorian is now able to be judged strictly "by appearances" just as Lord Henry urges (39). Almost no one will even see the portrait later in the novel, while everyone desires to see the portrait's inspiration. Yet in this way Dorian will no longer be viewed as a person; he will be desired because of his physical appearance, and people will want to see the physical image of Dorian, not the actual Dorian per se, while the portrait will become the visual image of Dorian's actual aging body.

The characters' awareness of the trade does not change anything about the aesthetic object though; the painting still does not reproduce any moral order to guide Dorian's actions, even when he believes it does. Though it could be argued to prompt Dorian to action, none of these actions leads anywhere. In the Sibyl Vane scenes, Dorian attempts to reconfigure morality that would normally be posited by/in Lord Henry's "twin terrors" with art in three instances: one in his rejection of Sibyl as "bad art," one in his viewing a work of art as "conscience," and one in his viewing a tragic suicide as a "wonderful play." Dorian reads art as nothing but order in these passages, as Andrew Elfenbein argues the novel "ironizes its philosophical speculations by implying that they are mind games, moments in a series of free speculations, rather than firm truths that can be captured and disseminated" (502). The firm truth presented by the preface appears to be undercut by the characters' "series of free speculations" about art as "conscience" or

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> The narrator informs us that "While he [Dorian] fascinated many," he was also surrounded by scandal and that "some of those who had been most intimate with him appeared, after a time, to shun him." This, however, did not in any way deter others' attraction to him, since "his frank debonair manner, his charming boyish smile, and the infinite grace of that wonderful youth that seemed never to leave him, were in themselves a sufficient answer" for these rumors. The narrator actually remarks how these rumors seem to make him *more* attractive and desirable, adding, "these whispered scandals only increased in the eyes of many his strange and dangerous charm" (154-55). It seems that Dorian has become desirable the same way the portrait would have been, perhaps even more due to the intimate qualities of these relationships which one usually would not share with a portrait.

as revolutionary. Unlike the preface, however, the characters' statements frequently do not add up to any "firm truth."

The painting is not his soul, and the symbol is not the actual object; Dorian only reads it that way, understands it as a symbol that is not read, but used. The symbol Dorian sees actually becomes his soul to him, becomes in his eyes the entity he believes it shows. Throughout the novel, the portrait seemingly reflects his "sins" and "conscience." Instead of Dorian's actions being guided by what is "holiness…to some, conscience to others, and the fear of God to us all," the portrait apparently takes on these roles and through the image revealed becomes Dorian's new moral compass (110).

Though the portrait becomes the visual image of the aging of Dorian's body and soul, it also has not been doing anything all along (otherwise attacking it would have somehow literally killed the moral order it symbolized for Dorian). The text does not appear to head here initially, however. The novel first presents what appears to be a revolution against moral order before undercutting this characterization. Before the three principal characters go to see Dorian's new beau Sibyl Vane play Shakespeare's Juliet, Lord Henry highlights the importance of becoming "in harmony with one's self" and asserts that "Modern morality consists in accepting the standard of one's age," and that to accept this order is actually "the grossest immorality" (93). This sort of aphoristic manner of speaking is the standard for Lord Henry, who says a great deal throughout about cultivating the individual, though to an extent he always tries to live vicariously through someone else. The conversation's setting is par for the course in the text: exquisite, decadent. The three men dine "in a private room at the Bristol," sipping "champagne in a meditative manner," and when Lord Henry begins espousing his

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> He "seek[s] to dominate" Dorian, for instance (53).

"theories" on women and marriage, Dorian lets out a laugh, and "toss[es] his head" (88, 92). The men bask in decadence, save Basil, who as usual frets over Lord Henry's seemingly immoral "theories," asking whether or not living for one's self is something for which one "pays a terrible price" (93). That remark aside, however, the setting and more so the conversation lean toward the un-Victorian, against existing order. As opposed to living a life of virtue and obedience to preordained moral orders, Lord Henry firmly believes and takes great pains to convince others that accepting preordained order is a gross crime against the self. 18 Just as Waldrep mentions, the novel is part of the "fin de siècle fear of entropy, failing empire, guilt, and the general death knell of the Victorian era" ("Gray Zones" 56). The "failing empire" and "general death knell" are Lord Henry. To accept the order of one's "age," his being the end of the Victorian era, is to accept both something repressive, and also dead or dying. Basil, while also recognizing this death, clings to the "fear of entropy." Whether or not the morality of one's age is dying and therefore ready to be usurped, one still "pays a terrible price" by attempting to move away from the moral order.

Dorian revokes his marriage proposal to Sibyl Vane because of her poor acting. Lord Henry and Basil both stand up and leave the performance of *Romeo and Juliet*, as her acting is "simply bad art" (99). Sibyl's performance is "curiously listless" when the curtain opens, and the end of the second act is greeted with a "storm of hisses" (98-99). Dorian visits her backstage afterwards and leaves her "crouched on the floor" while a "fit

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Lord Henry's brand of "self" seems different from the novel's, as the text makes one consideration Lord Henry does not seem to. The text and the narrator himself views a self as something binary; in Chapter Eleven, when considering insincerity as not "such a terrible thing," the positive aspect of insincerity is that it is "merely a method by which we can multiply our personalities" (156). Of course, the text takes this multiplicity to an extreme in Dorian: his self is truly binary in that part of himself is housed in the portrait. Lord Henry, on the other hand, never alludes to an explicit definition of the self, yet does not give the reader any reason to view his understanding of the self as anything more than a singular entity, unlike the novel's clear division between body/soul in the Dorian/portrait paradigm.

of passionate sobbing choked her" after he grumbles to her, "You killed my love" (102-3). Because of her poor acting, Dorian mutters, "You used to stir my imagination," yet "Now you don't even stir my curiosity." Dorian here reveres Shakespeare far above Sibyl; to perform his work in a "curiously listless" manner offends Dorian's aestheticmoral code enough to make him unimaginably cruel, leaving a young woman brokenhearted. Horst Breuer claims the above scene refashions Wilde's essay "The Portrait of Mr. W.H.," a critical study of Shakespeare's Sonnets (59). As the essay is about Shakespeare's love for a young actor, Willie Hughes, and his "marriage with his (Shakespeare's) Muse," or a marriage between performance artist and playwright, it seems Wilde has simplified this plot ("Mr. W.H." 18). Instead of a playwright, the actress's art is the object of an audience member's desires. However her "bad art" ends this marriage for Dorian, as he did not love the person, but the performance. When he becomes infatuated with her at first, he does, after all, say she is "Never" Sibyl Vane when he sees her, and she is "more than an individual" (70-71). Art directs Dorian's desires. Sibyl Vane does not cause him to reject Sibyl Vane, but her embodied performance, her art does. Dorian once again acts upon, instead of reading, visual art. Art prompts Dorian to mistakenly act, revoking his marriage proposal to someone who is "Never" herself, and never would be, as she is always someone else, always art. Yet when this art is bad, "listless," it prompts Dorian as spectator to leave.

After the cruel rejection, the reader and Dorian catch the first glimpse of the portrait's change. He returns home to notice an odd change in the painting, and considers his actions further after seeing the new "touch of cruelty in the mouth": after some deliberation, Dorian concludes that he "would not sin" anymore, and will "go back to

Sibyl Vane...[and] try to love her again," marking the first of a few failed attempts by the principal character to "change his ways," as it were (105-7). Yet his viewing the painting and seeing the "touch of cruelty" causes this change. Dorian never moves away from viewing his actions as "sins" and the portrait as anything besides his "soul," whether he tries to run to or from what he understand as "sin." As Dorian had previously used art as a stand-in for emotion with his use of Sibyl the work of art, his aesthetics are now expectations of the work of art to produce, to recreate the same, to cause him to think on his misdeeds as misdeeds, then direct him to act in a fashion that will lead to repentance. He then writes a "passionate letter to the girl he had loved, imploring her forgiveness" (111). Right after this, Lord Henry visits Dorian to inform him that Sibyl killed herself (112-13).

Dorian first lets out a "cry of pain" upon hearing this news, but after considering the suicide, concludes the event "seems ...to be simply like a wonderful ending to a wonderful play," and that "this thing" somehow "does not affect me as it should" (112, 115). Dorian begins to feel grief at the loss of a somewhat-loved one, but grief suddenly changes into appreciation for a "wonderful ending" to a theatrical performance. The lack of emotion makes this particular scene unsettling: Dorian ceases to ponder the event on any level, surrendering the suicide as a work of art instead. When pondering the death of the woman he was going to return to, he moves immediately from grief to art, a disturbing display of Sheldon Liebman's "aesthetically distanced drama" (299). The portrait is allowed to stand in for his soul, while Dorian increases the distance between himself and the actual world around him. Art prompts Dorian to act, and he remains lethargic when prompted by his own life. More importantly, the action directed toward

repenting for sin in Dorian deciding to "mend [his] ways" before hearing of Sibyl's suicide is a moment of epiphany that, unsurprisingly, is undercut. The action the work of art prompts him to has no end result in reality; the news of the suicide brought by another human being undoes this action, whereas the portrait guides his desires and thoughts.

The difference between visual and literary art is in the possession of a delusional use as a symbol: an aphorism, or any verbal response to his emotions, results in no action. In the following passage, Lord Henry informs Dorian that any event in real life that cannot be regarded as a work of art should be disregarded period: "It often happens that the real tragedies of life occur 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" (115). Lord Henry causes inaction in Dorian through conversation. Real life and its "real tragedies" are too vulgar, too "absurd" to be regarded. One does, and is supposed to, "revolt against" the "sheer brute force" of such vulgarity. Yet Dorian ignores Lord Henry's directive to treat art as the "aesthetically distanced drama" in regards to the portrait. Dorian continues to invest the symbol with a use, though he is here capable of distancing himself from his own life. He cannot invest Lord Henry with use, because Lord Henry will respond verbally in some fashion that will easily undo any meaning Dorian attempts to ascribe to the person or event. Yet the portrait seemingly can be filled with meaning as much as Dorian likes...at least, so he feels until the end.

Conversation with Lord Henry tends to cause inaction. Lord Henry urges Dorian to understand these "sins" as not actually sins, but merely the socially-constructed notion of "sin": the "terrors" of "God" as religion and "society" as the state are what "govern us," what turn our desires into "sins" (35). In an attempt to reconfigure his desires

outside of his societal milieu, Dorian uses the portrait as his soul, leaving him beholden to the notion of sin. Dorian refers to the portrait as his "conscience" numerous times in the text; he then hides his conscience in an attic, and in the end considers that it "had been conscience," and therefore needed to be "destroy[ed]" (234). Then his sins, particularly his murder of Basil Hallward, will no longer "dog him all his life." Dorian thus never understands desire outside of its relation to sin, but also never treats others around him the way he treats the portrait. For one so beholden to sin, he rarely attempts to tell Lord Henry that there is a reality to sin that will "dog [one] all his life." Yet the aesthetic object also gives no cues that it cannot be used this way, unlike the verbal cues someone like Lord Henry would certainly provide. Dorian may read the portrait as a symbol of revolution, as showing him something about sin's "dog[ging] him all his life," but this use of symbol is not inherently part of the work of art. Rather the spectator turned the visual image of his aging body into this "sin" that hounded him. The visual image is conflated with visible symbol, is used as symbol in that it prompts him to action, yet also does not actually possess this use, nor is there some truth behind the image that adds up to this symbol. The portrait showed the visual image, and bringing a use value to visible symbol does not actually change what the image is in the end. The portrait cannot produce revolution precisely because it cannot produce the same. The "touch of cruelty" in the painting is not productive of moral order, though Dorian mistakes it for such order.

This is the same faulty model Lord Henry seemingly presents at the outset. A "revolution" of hedonism inevitably will reproduce the same, as Dorian will be unable to understand action outside of the same paradigm as before; his "sins" must be frowned on by the disapproving gaze, or "touch of cruelty" in the painting. This frown prompts him

to further action. This faulty revolution is what Lord Henry seemingly urges Dorian towards: to "cure the soul" by use of the "senses," to "live out...life fully and completely," to work to understand desire as something besides Victorian repression (35, 37). Lord Henry informs Dorian to remember the "duty that one owes to one's self" and move away from religion and the state, ignoring any notion that makes him feel his desires are "monstrous" and "unlawful." In short, Lord Henry urges a non-militaristic revolution against the current moral order. However part of Lord Henry's central argument is that a revolution must come full circle and replace the now-overthrown order. A "new Hedonism" completes Lord Henry's revolution, with the maxim of fully "curing the soul by means of the senses." It is the very nature of this discussion about replacing the "detestable" society of Victorian England with a "new Hedonism" that makes the discussion one about revolution and not simply pastoral escape: Dorian is not being told to flee his Victorian oppressors, but rather to live this hedonistic lifestyle, that he "might be its visible symbol" (39). This "visible symbol" reduces Dorian, just as he reduces his portrait, to a revolutionary function. Art is thus invested with symbolic use value; Dorian tries to make it something besides "quite useless." A "use" for revolution is the ability to invest an object with producing moral order that prompts action, to make a painting "conscience." The "duty that one owes to one's self" is not folded back into mere pastoral escape because it still involves use as the figurehead of this sort of revolution, still involves either Dorian himself becoming the "visible symbol" of a revolution, or the portrait as Dorian's "visible symbol" of his own revolution. A delusional brand of revolution in *Dorian Gray*, then, is completely expected: revolution

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Forbes Morlock argues that this entire scene in the garden is speaking to the reader and Dorian simultaneously, and that "The seduction of Dorian in *The Picture*" is also our seduction by *The Picture*" (72).

does not do what it claims to do, does not produce the new. It invests art with revolutionary symbolism, ignoring the preface's assurance that art will not produce any fixed truth that adds up to moral order.

The novel shows the difficulty of moving away from this order and understanding one's actions as anything but either sins or repentance. When he decides to move the portrait into the attic and "hide his soul from the eyes of men," he forces the painting to keep its role as conscience, while simply trying to hide from it (135). This move up to the attic might seem to be an attempt to avoid completing a hedonistic revolution, but it rather confirms the portrait's role as conscience once again. Instead of asking the portrait to act as soul or conscience, which he had done after noticing the "touch of cruelty" from rejecting Sibyl Vane, Dorian simply tries to ignore the symbol, to just hide sin.

In yet another sense, he even continues to attempt to use the portrait as symbolic of how sin affects his soul, while simultaneously ignoring its message of the "hideous corruption of his soul" (136). In both cases, he (directly or indirectly) assigns morality to an object, which inevitably ends in failure, largely because it is a misuse of the aesthetic object: Bruder argues that Wilde "ironically plays out" his philosophy that "individual morality" should replace "art's morality" in the novel. Wilde allows a piece of art to survive at the end, while forcing individual morality back onto the person, though the text seems to claim otherwise (168). Use in the end belongs to Dorian; the moral order he invested the revolutionary symbol with is something which only he can be beholden to. The ending is a rebuke of Lord Henry and Dorian, though it punishes the latter far more. Lord Henry's main punishment is Wilde's giving the painting the "last word" in the novel. Haslam argues that this would have been a scene of Lord Henry reacting "to the

news of Dorian's death," and would have "subordinated the moralizing dimension" of the novel, and "vindicated aestheticism" ("Gothic Modes" 309). I agree that Lord Henry would likely have been distraught at the news of Dorian's death, though he likely would also have felt it a "wonderful ending," and been upset only in the way he mourns the departure of his wife as making his house "rather lonely" (115, 224). He would be upset, but not inconsolable. Yet the ending of the novel does not fail to vindicate aestheticism. The "withered, wrinkled, and loathsome" Dorian is moral and affected by what he perceived as the use of the portrait. The signs of "aging" that the painting shows are just visual images; to Dorian they are marks of a use of his own body. A human body being "withered" or "wrinkled" is an actual sign of aging, whereas for the portrait it would be just an image. The work of art has "exquisite youth and beauty," is beautiful in that it does not have a use. Art all along has not been symbol for revolution; Dorian has merely ascribed this use to it, ignoring the fact that the object could not be used in this way, was indeed all along useless.

The painting does not have a use, even as fetish. Ronald Thomas argues, "the image is preserved (or restored), and it is the subject (Dorian) who has become the spectacle that is edited out and left lying on the cutting room floor" (188). For Thomas, the portrait is the first motion picture, and a new medium for art through which the "vulgarity" of modernism can flow. The portrait, for Thomas, is likened to Dorian's "yellow book"; it is "not so much a narrative to read (since it has no plot) but a fetishistic object upon which to focus his own obsessive gaze" (190). As "fetishistic object," Dorian can invest the portrait with whatever desires he wishes. Whether or not Wilde was consciously trying to write a novel about a "motion picture" is difficult to tell,

according to Thomas, as the motion picture at the time was "in the process of being developed" (187). However what remains pertinent is that the changing images "transform Dorian...into a spectator of his own increasingly vulgar life," where both his "reality" and "history" become "interchangeable with...the images" (187). The ways in which Dorian's existence revolve around the portrait confirm this. As mentioned above, he either hides from or obsesses over the object; the whereabouts of the painting, along with the image it may or may not currently reveal to him and how he reads the image as symbol, are what drive the narrative forward until its conclusion.

Yet the portrait is more than just a fetishistic object in the novel, as it is not the object itself that Dorian obsesses over, but rather what he believes the object stands in for. Thomas is correct to assert that Dorian obsesses over the portrait, but this obsession is not just over what it shows, but what Dorian feels the image means. Once again the tendency to read the novel as about Dorian would confirm this use for the painting, yet Wilde is not interested in that. As Bruder claims, the aesthetic object does not have any innate morality. Even arguing that the novel is about "individual morality" tends toward calling the novel a Bildungsroman in some fashion and reading it as about Dorian, when the novel is about the portrait, about art. The novel does not show the portrait as fetishistic object, nor does it show anything concerned directly with "individual morality." Rather the reader has no reason to expect that Dorian will succeed in trying to create the new. None of the young man's actions are guided toward this; instead, he always does what will reproduce the same, the portrait's gaze somehow always reminding him of "sin" and guiding him to action. The portrait is not a functional symbol, nor is it this "fetishistic object" that Dorian can obsess over.

Yet the new is produced in the text, and not all of the characters' actions are failed revolutions. Liebman claims Lord Henry has something like a "schizoid personality" which allows him to "turn reality into art," thus "transforming everyday human events into aesthetically distanced drama" (299). Liebman sees this in Lord Henry's aphorisms, precisely because of his wisdom acquired over the years which leads him to believe in a "world without purpose" (299). He exhibits this trait in the scene where he consoles Dorian after bringing him the news that Sibyl has committed suicide. Lord Henry does not say we "seem" to be spectators; we "are." For Lord Henry, the world has the potential to be art on occasion, and we the spectators. For the novel, "The spectator" is already what art "mirrors" (18). Lord Henry and Dorian can become spectators of Sibyl's suicide. Eerily, according to the preface, viewing Sibyl's suicide as art is exactly what art does to begin with. It "mirrors" Dorian's life back to him, is ahead of the spectator insofar as it can repeat the events of one's life as a "play," unlike Lord Henry's belief that it would be "as if" it were a play. Instead of an event prompting one to action, the role of the spectator is to sit back and enjoy the artistic effect, to read the image without acting upon it.

Yet the importance of Lord Henry's claim is that art affects us and invests in us, but does not actually have any use for the spectator, is not beholden to the spectator. The enumeration of Dorian's collection of aesthetic objects is an obfuscatory chapter which serves to define exactly how Dorian tries to "revive" his senses, becoming fascinated with anything from "perfumes," and their "heavily scented oils," to "the study of jewels," to "embroideries and...tapestries" of ancient societies (147, 149, 151). Dorian treats

several aesthetic objects as useless, but then turns around and mistakenly invests the portrait as a revolutionary symbol. He spends his time studying the "senses" and the "spiritual mysteries" they have to reveal, becoming "absolutely absorbed" in each of these different objects for a time before dismissing them all. The "yellow book" in particular is an object Dorian treats as useless: he owns "no less than nine large-paper copies" of the same book, "bound in different colours, so that they might suit his various moods and the changing fancies of a nature over which he seemed, at times, to have almost entirely lost control" (141).

Dorian treats the "yellow book" as useless, unlike the portrait: even if he vacillates between being fascinated or horrified by the painting, he permanently invests it with the symbol of revolution over his actions. The "yellow book," on the other hand, has no fixed symbol or use ascribed to it. The "no less than nine" copies of the same book are superfluous to emphasize their uselessness: this number serves to suit Dorian's "various moods," and the text provides no specificity as to what these "moods" are, or how the different books might be treated as symbolic of something else. Rather the books serve no function, do not prompt Dorian to action. Even with the enumeration of "no less than nine," the books are seen to be not serving any larger aim. The narrator cannot even tell exactly how many copies Dorian has; suffice it to say there are plenty. Not only is there no specific way in which Dorian uses even one copy, but the text does not differentiate between them because they do not serve any one fixed purpose. There is no use precisely because the books are read so differently each time that the consistent change cannot produce any fixed symbol to prompt Dorian to action. The yellow book is the quite useless object par excellence in Dorian's collection, while the portrait is

something he treats as the exact opposite. The portrait is fixed in place, and as visible symbol has one set meaning to Dorian. Yet the yellow book changes in relation to Dorian's moods; the book has no fixed meaning, reveals something wholly different each time, making "no less than nine" copies something simultaneously desirable and useless. He understands the novel as "the story of his own life, written before he had lived it," yet as already mentioned he does not use the novel to produce action. Instead it makes him "unconscious" of the world around him, of "the falling day and creeping shadows." The portrait, on the other hand, is not read as this same form of being outside of day-to-day life. If anything, besides viewing the portrait as something ever-changing, Dorian occasionally views it as subordinate to him, is "enamoured of his own beauty" while also "more and more interested in the corruption of his own soul" (142). The portrait, unlike the book that lived his life before he did, instead lives for Dorian, while sometimes even becoming a subordinate object that "gives him pleasure" when he watches it change (154). It is not that Dorian finds pleasure in an object and therefore invests it with use. Rather this "pleasure" emphasizes the more strongly how Dorian invests the portrait with use. The painted image, as revealing his "conscience" and its aging to him, is an object he can use even for his own pleasure. Christopher Craft equates Dorian's viewing of the portrait to a form of "self-identification" that Dorian does not find in a novel he himself feels "contain[s] the story of his own life" (141). The visual image can be misinterpreted in a way the literary work is not, though neither of these objects have any use in the end regardless.

In a passage about Dorian's consideration of joining the Roman Catholic Church, the narrator informs us that "he never fell into the error of arresting his intellectual

development by any *formal* acceptance of creed or system" (146, my emphasis). The "error" is only an error if Dorian accepted any "*formal*" system of belief. When he looks at the portrait, he still views his actions as "sins," and still views the portrait as the "corruption of his own soul" (142). Without a formal creed of some kind, Dorian still does not move away from viewing the visual image as Nunokawa's "hangover"; the aging face on the canvas still shows him "sin" in the end, still shows an image that he believes has a use, as opposed to an image by itself. The narrator's differentiation between religion and a similar order Dorian tries to reproduce through the portrait shows how truly difficult moving beyond morality can be. The tendency is to reproduce the same order, whether or not as "formal" acceptance. In other words, Dorian is completely unsurprising in his treating the portrait as revolutionary symbol: though it is a mistake to ascribe this use to art, this is also the inevitably flawed nature of revolution.

Dorian misunderstands art in referring to the portrait as his "soul" and "conscience," a mistake for which he will pay dearly in the end. Gerald Monsman, referring to Plato's *Phaedrus*, argues that the end result of the aesthetic presented in Wilde's novel (as well as in Walter Pater's *Gaston de Latour*) is "not art's intrinsic morality as such," but "the innate inclinations of the beholder" (26). This sense of individual morality comes from the preface mentioned above, claiming, "It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors." Indeed, unlike his tutor Pater, who removed passages from *Latour* because "it might possibly mislead some of those young men into whose hands it might fall," Wilde instead added the preface to the work to cripple such charges of immorality: Dorian's attempt to view art as morality is unsuccessful and is an attack on the self (Monsman 28). Investing the work with

morality, with a use, is exactly what kills Dorian at the end. What is perhaps more chilling is the fact that Dorian's error is so unsurprising.

Contrary to Alley's labeling of the novel as "tragedy" or Haslam's claim that it "suffers under a divided aim of style," the novel has a happy ending where the real hero walks away victorious at last ("Gothic Modes" 310). When the servants enter the attic and discover Dorian's body after his stabbing of the portrait, they behold "a splendid portrait of their master as they had last seen him" (235). Art, in the end, regains its beauty and ageless qualities and is able to shirk the delusion of use value, because it never had this use value to begin with. Man, on the other hand, is not so lucky; Dorian is "a dead man, in evening dress, with a knife in his heart." Dorian not only dies, being no longer ageless and seemingly immortal as he had been, but the aging of his soul, merely an image on the canvas previously, hits his body not as an image but as his actual age, explaining the "crash" heard by his servants when he stabs the portrait. All of his past "crash[es]" into his body at once, aging him several years in a few seconds. Dorian's physical form can be used up, can expire. The body of a portrait, however, a work of art, cannot "expire" or, perhaps more appropriately, die. Thus the ending confirms the expected misuse of symbol as a reproduction of the same; art does not work this way, or work in any fashion, but the propensity with investing an object as symbolic of a revolutionary project is to consistently work toward this reproduction, trying to use the object in ways it does not allow for. He consistently views his actions as "sins" throughout the narrative, and thereby always acts in accordance with whatever will allow him to continue to read the visual image this way. Any and all of his actions are always directed at reconfirming his delusional view of the portrait as symbolic of moral order.

Dorian's inability to successfully reproduce this "new Hedonism" in the text is what seems to cause the consistent use of the word "moral" in relation to the novel: Richard Haslam, as mentioned above, argues that the novel lacks focus in trying to use the "Gothic mode" in the story "decoratively" along with the "aesthetic mode" and the "satirical mode" ("Gothic Modes" 307). This "divided aim" is what, Haslam argues, causes Wilde himself to admit feeling regret at having included a "terrible moral" in the novel (*Letters* 430-31). The "Gothic mode" is what "colonized the plot" for Haslam, and added the "moral" dimension to the novel.

Yet the ending of the novel is a moral about art's removal from moral order, and thus from revolution: art cannot be used as one's soul or conscience or substitute transcendence for morality. We spend the entire narrative seeing the non-development of Dorian, as he either hides from what he assumes is his soul, studies it with intrigue, or attacks it (135, 185, 154, 234-35). Above and beyond this, however, we have little reason to read the novel as about Dorian, since art is what the reader sees both at the beginning and end. The reader also knows exactly how to answer what the new would look like in the novel, as opposed to Dorian's constant reproduction of various permutations of the same: the "yellow book," and even portrait, to an extent. Yet there is a form literature takes that escapes having delusional use value ascribed to it. Dorian may have incorrectly ascribed a use to the painting the entire time after recognizing it as himself, and that use may not actually have been in the painting, but he never does this with a literary work where a similar recognition takes place. The book, and the non-specific number of copies Dorian possesses, is an aesthetic object with no fixed meaning.

Christopher Nassaar finds it important to note that the portrait is not "hung in the attic, it is simply laid against a wall" (2). The reason this distinction is so important is because of the "weight" Nassaar argues it bears: its "growing heaviness" correlates directly to Dorian's "short-lived" wish to change course after he notices the portrait's first change, following his slighting of Sibyl Vane (1). The "crash" Dorian's servants hear at the end of the novel, for Nassaar, is actually "the transference of all of his sins onto him from the portrait," along with just Dorian's body hitting the floor (2). Nassaar's reasoning behind this is his attempt to account for a possible technical fault in the essay: the picture is "hanging on the wall" when the servants find Dorian (2). In other words, the portrait has somehow leapt from the floor and its original leaning place onto a mount on the wall, being "lightened dramatically" and finding its "renewed innocence."

Haslam, however, negates this reading with one line from the novel which contains the phrase "he had hung with his own hands the terrible portrait," which occurs in Chapter 11 ("Dorian Gray" 1). Tragically, there are no leaping portraits in the novel. Haslam concludes, "There is no evidence to suggest that the portrait grows heavier (or lighter)" in the text, but that the "metaphorical significance of the portrait's weight" is worth noting (2). Haslam calls the portrait a "piece of religious art...a new and troubling genre," which would be Dorian's "monstrous soul-life" the novel refers to (2). I would push Haslam's claim one step further: not only is Nassaar's reading of the "crash" as the literal motion of the aesthetic object inaccurate, but even a "metaphorical significance" of the weight of the object is something that only Dorian hallucinates into being. The point of the ending, the uselessness of the object, does not just mean that when Dorian stabs the

portrait he stabs himself. Much more importantly, it means any literal significance, or "metaphorical significance" for that matter, is a hallucination.

## JUDGMENT

...all sins, as theologians weary not of reminding us, are sins of disobedience.<sup>20</sup>

Two aesthetic objects invite judgment in the novel: the portrait and the yellow book. The image in the portrait is unique, as the visual image is easier to co-opt and make symbolic of something it does not show. The self-identification Dorian sees on the canvas immerses the image in his daily life, unlike the book, which removes him from it. The form this takes in the literary object is the Wildean aphorism, which creates a useless judgment that does not reproduce the same. In fact, the useless judgment is quite useless in both the extreme way that it does not work to reproduce the same and the fairly useless way that it has no concern either way. The preface to the novel, for example, creates a judgment of art that does not, in any way, stop the narrative from progressing. Dorian can still attempt to make art judge him where his actions are "sins," even if the preface claims art is "quite useless." Yet this attempt will, and does, fail, because the judgment produced by the literary aphorism would never be revealed in any fashion had Dorian not actually tried to stab what he sees as judging his sins. In attempting to stab his own soul and kill what can be judged, Dorian succeeds, though not in the manner he thought. The work of art was never his soul, because it could not properly serve as such. It was only a visual image, was always "quite useless" in that it did not enter into the paradigm of judgment as reproduction of the same. Thus the problem with judgment in the novel is twofold: one, how does the literary object escape even the hallucination that it can reproduce the same, and two, how exactly does a useless judgment produce the new?

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> From *Dorian Gray*, p. 201.

In Dorian's relationship with the portrait, judgment works as an expectation: Dorian expects to be the "sinner," and to be judged by the portrait. This reading of the portrait as judge inevitably leads to disappointment on Dorian's part. In fact, two key episodes in the text, Dorian's murder of the artist and his attempted murder of the work of art, show both the extent of Dorian's disappointment when judgment does not produce the desired results, and also the uselessness of the portrait as symbol. Dorian misinterprets judgment the same way he misunderstands the visual image of the portrait: he ponders, after murdering Basil, "Who made him a judge over others?" without giving a passing thought to his own erroneous judgment of the entire situation (197). When Dorian attempts to stab judgment in the person of the artist, he is both reacting violently to the one other person in the room and also doing so because he reads judgment into the artist. But this attack does not "kill" judgment in any fashion; no attack on the artist or his/her art will produce the expected results. In the end, in a moment of wild desperation, he redirects all of this violence back to the portrait, attacking the very object he erroneously read as judge.

Yet the novel does not want the reader to believe that Dorian should be "blamed" for not escaping judgment: the point is that this escape is nearly impossible. The seemingly reasonable solution is to find a way to make judgment "smile" at you, instead of scowl. Dorian occasionally tries to act in a manner he feels will alter the portrait for the better, and is disappointed when it looks worse. The moral in Wilde's letter to the *St. James's Gazette* is a moral about a human being's inability to escape judgment and moral order. Both "excess" and "renunciation" bring the "punishment" of judgment because a person always understands their actions in this fashion. Hedonism is punished as sin the

same way that asceticism is already punishment. Either configuration is still judgment of action as "sin," which then prompts Dorian to act in a manner which will reproduce more judgment. Even after murdering the artist, Basil, whom Dorian feels is to be blamed for his current plight, the changed image on the canvas still reproduces for Dorian one of his three standard reactions by this point: the image is "more horrible" than Basil's dead body, and he quickly covers the picture so as not to see the image, or let anyone else see it either (172, 185). He tries to avoid the image, even grows paranoid of others potentially viewing it, but by the end the action of murdering Hallward is too great to be borne. This murder is the "sin" he cannot have "dog him all his life." Thus Dorian's action to try and avoid judgment, covering the portrait, still in the end reproduces judgment as he still understands the image as symbolic of his sins. Judgment's inescapability folds into how Dorian reads symbol: objects to be misinterpreted populate his world.

Dorian's murder of Basil Hallward, the painter of his portrait, stems from the same violence that causes him to attempt to destroy the portrait at the end of the novel. When he kills Hallward, he attacks and blames the artist for his interpretation of the symbol he sees in work. Whether or not this violates the claim from the preface is unimportant: the novel both argues that the tendency of a disappointed spectator is to attack the artist regardless, and also that the preface, as a series of epigrams, is not exactly going to "rush" to Basil's defense, as it were. To maintain a distinction between art and artist is tantamount to understanding art as quite useless, yes, but neither the portrait, preface, nor yellow book as aesthetic objects would do anything to actually enforce this. Thus Basil's murder would never have been prevented. In the novel, a

disappointed spectator always lashes out at the artist first because he/she can. Leading up to the murder, Dorian consistently fears that someone might catch a glimpse of the bynow-hideous painting, and that "during his absence some one might gain access to the room" (154). He takes great pains to comfort himself and assuage his own paranoia on the subject, with the "elaborate bars that he had caused to be placed upon the door," yet even at this he still rushes back home frequently to see whether or not "the door had been tampered with" and to assure himself that the painting had not been "stolen." Dorian is afraid to show his soul to the world largely because of what he fears the world would think, and consistently wants to avoid discussion of any subject of considerable weight, as if he can hide judgment in the attic. When he first meets Basil outside his house, he implores him, "mind you don't talk about anything serious" (161). Since he hid his soul in the attic, Dorian still vacillates between avoiding the portrait and studying it intensely. Here, he avoids it.

When he finds Basil waiting for him at home, a "strange sense of fear" overtakes him which only multiplies when Basil mentions wanting to "see" his "soul," which coincidentally he believes he really can show to Basil. This causes Dorian to become "almost white with fear," as he worries that Basil will read the image the same way he does (160, 165). Yet his fear quickly turns into a "madness of pride," and he decides to invite Basil to view the painting. Dorian maintains this madness on the way upstairs, laughing when Basil says that to somehow show another man one's own soul is "blasphemy" (166). Dorian's original fear of moral order turns into a "madness of pride" because his ability to actually do the apparently impossible, show Basil his soul, reveals to Dorian something he had not yet considered. Basil initially does not believe Dorian

can do any wrong, as his "pure, bright, innocent face, and [his] marvellous untroubled youth" must free him from scandal and sin in some fashion, and that "only God" could show someone's soul to the world (163, 165). Yet this naiveté produces a "madness of pride" because Dorian believes that the portrait does exactly what the painter claims "only God" could do. Furthermore the soul he sees on the canvas is Basil's "own handiwork." In other words, Dorian believes Basil is complicit in the seemingly impossible, and as coconspirators, Basil is at least partly responsible for his plight. Therefore he leads Basil up to the attic believing in the portrait's ability to produce judgment; he tells Basil he shall now see "corruption...face to face."

When Basil finally sees the painting and gasps in horror, Dorian is listless: he shows "neither real sorrow...nor real joy," and has the expression of "those who are absorbed in a play," just as Dorian expressed in his feelings over Sibyl's suicide, which was a "wonderful ending to a wonderful play" (168, 115). He here observes the world as if it were a work of art, not acting on a symbol but instead reading an event as aesthetically distant; unlike the symbol he fears in the portrait, real-life-as-drama produces no reaction. Yet his motives for having Basil see the portrait are different from mere observation: Dorian shows Basil the work of art because he is the original artist, and must if not be responsible for, at least share in his current plight as the artist of the portrait Dorian now views as his judge. He even tells the man, "You have had more to do with my life than you think," though Basil has actually had very little to do with Dorian's life (167). Basil's knowledge of his friend's daily affairs comes all from hearsay, as they see each other "very seldom" (163). Yet Dorian interprets the artist as somehow having something to do with his own reading of the portrait; if Dorian can view the portrait as

symbolic of judgment, Basil must have put the possibility there, and the artist must have some part in the use the portrait seemingly has.

Basil cries out when he identifies "his own picture," and is horrified by Dorian. He exclaims, "what a thing I must have worshipped!" and, "It has the eyes of a devil" (168-69). Both "Christ" and "the devil" recall imagery of an order Dorian wants to evade. He implores the artist "with a wild gesture of despair" not to view him as the hideous monstrosity on the canvas, retorting, "Each of us has heaven and hell in him." Basil responds by urging Dorian to pray; then Dorian further ascribes the sense of judgment he feels is in the painting to Basil as well. Dorian feels it is "too late" to repent, and when Basil persists, Dorian kills him (170-71). The murder fills him with a sense of completion, and he concludes that shoving the artist "out of his life" is "enough" (172).

Basil's death is Dorian's attempted murder of a moral order he sees symbolized in another person, yet the action does not actually do what Dorian wants it to accomplish. However this does not change the fact that it does, and was bound to, happen. Art's uselessness can, and does, attack the artist. The mention of "prayer," of asking a transcendent being for guidance, for judgment to guide one's actions finally brings about the "hatred" in Dorian resulting in murder. Basil's death is Dorian's attempted murder of judgment in the novel and his conclusion that the engine that produces said moral order is gone, which is "enough." The murder is "enough" because Dorian mistakenly identifies the artist as somehow the bringer of judgment, and therefore to be blamed for Dorian's (mis)interpretation. Basil has "had more to do with [his] life" because Dorian's reading of the portrait must have been put in the work by Basil. Dorian had always used the attic as a place to hide, whether he conceal what he views as his soul as a young man, or his

childhood memories of the room, when he recalls "Every moment of his lonely childhood" after viewing "the huge Italian cassone...in which he had so often hidden himself as a boy" (136). In many senses, his murder of the artist as a murder of moral order is a violent way of trying to cast off the depravity that Rashkin argues his past has "cast upon" him (71). Yet this murder does nothing to "cast off" the portrait, or change the image to something he might read as a symbol of something else; Dorian misinterprets the judgment he erroneously found symbolized in the visual image. Furthermore, Dorian misunderstands the use of judgment by conflating it with his "childhood memories" of abuse. He believes that he can hide all judgment in the attic, whether it be the portrait or Basil's body, just as he has "hidden" his childhood abuse in the attic. He believes that this "hiding" will accomplish some sort of erasure of judgment from his life; moral order will no longer be part of his existence because he killed what he erroneously read as the symbol of it in the person of Basil Hallward. Now, without giving a passing thought to whether or not he has possibly misunderstood the situation, Dorian concludes that this "hiding" is "enough." Destroying one symbol and hiding another will somehow free him from judgment.

This scene seems to confirm the "orthodoxy" Buma claims the text possesses. While Dorian considers his murder of Basil as a murder of moral order, he still boils with rage at the question, "Who made him (Hallward) a judge over others?" and while he allows his opium addiction to lead him to "Ugliness" as it will aid his attempted "forgetfulness" (197-98), he continues to be followed by his conscience, the very entity he wished to hide, and hide from. He slowly finds that he cannot successfully hide his past in the attic; the symbol of "hiding" something away does not function the way he

thought. When Dorian begins to be haunted by the image and physical presence of James Vane, the brother of Sibyl who swore he "shall kill" anyone who "does [Sibyl] any wrong," he ponders, "how terrible it was to think that conscience could raise such fearful phantoms" (84, 212). Then the "image of his sin" comes on him with "horror" that leaves him weeping. In his inability to erase his own memory completely with drugs, Dorian is continuously haunted by what he still considers to be "sin." After his first appearance in public since murdering Hallward, he feels the powerful need for opium, which could serve as "oblivion," and could help erase his memory of his past actions: "the memory of old sins could be destroyed by the madness of sins that were new" (196). Yet the sins are never "new" in the novel; any action of Dorian's that he considers "sin" reproduces the same relationship with the portrait.

The problem here is not that the portrait necessarily represents soul or conscience falsely, or that the opium was not sufficiently potent; Dorian misreads the visual image as symbolic of something else. The portrait is not showing the aging, or Nunokawa's "hangover," but rather *must* be showing judgment for Dorian's delusion to work. The "loathsome red dew" he finds after murdering Basil could not be a blood stain from stabbing someone in the head (185). Rather the stain must somehow also scowl at him, judging his action. In other words, the blood stain must somehow show "disobedience."

Toward the end, Dorian is slowly erased by the portrait, where his "own personality" is now a "burden" to him (216). The judgment he sees on the canvas haunts him too powerfully, and the "image of his sin" continuously returns to him, "Out of the black cave of time, terrible and swathed in scarlet" (212). The visual image has become such a powerful symbol that it now overpowers him. As an image now hidden in a

"black cave" and covered in "scarlet" blood, all he thinks of is judgment, of his wrongdoing. To him the portrait is, after all, his conscience. Thus when he ponders that "conscience could raise such fearful phantoms, and give them visible form," the painting, he believes, follows him, haunts him. He hid it in the attic, yet it still has the power to create, to "raise," a "visible form" of his sins before him.

Yet he does try to escape this; Dorian attempts to completely undo what he feels is revolution toward the end, when he tells Lord Henry that "I have done too many dreadful things in my life," and "I am not going to do any more" (221). However there are two events on either side of this statement that make his refutation of sensualism or hedonism an empty dismissal. First, the accidental murder of James Vane causes Dorian to weep for joy, as "his eyes were full of tears, for he knew he was safe" (220). It is no coincidence that Dorian's wish to "turn over a new leaf," as it were, follows after his being haunted, and potentially murdered, by his past. 21 Dorian's memory haunting and almost killing him sufficiently scares him straight back to the notion of sin as something terrible, thus making his refutation of hedonism not a sincere one, but rather simply an instinct for self-preservation; his sins will literally return to shoot him. Dorian cannot break free of judgment because he does not read any visual image, be it the portrait or just the sight of James Vane, as something besides his own "sins." Unlike his aesthetically distanced gaze when first watching Basil view the portrait or when reconsidering Sibyl's suicide, moments where he nearly escapes judgment, Basil's mentioning of Dorian's being a "sinner" folds him right back into the same endless loop.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> When James Vane first attempts to murder Dorian, Dorian escapes through simple manipulative addition: James claims that Dorian broke his sister's heart eighteen years ago, and Dorian insists James look at him under the light of a lamp, so that James will discover the apparently young man's countenance to be one "little more than a lad of twenty summers" (203). James quickly finds out, through the help of a prostitute, that he was deceived, and continues to stalk Dorian until his accidental murder.

Thus doing "good deeds" becomes what he feels is self-preservation: Dorian does not want to create the new, to move on from judgment, but rather wants to make judgment smile on him, instead of the scowl he consistently thinks he sees, both in the portrait and in his own memory.

Yet the instinct for self-preservation by doing only "good deeds" is undercut by how he reads the visual image yet again. Right before his destruction of the portrait, the "true" nature of the change he has made undoes this turn back to a former order. In his one "good deed" since his change, Dorian assumes the portrait will "no longer be a terror to him" and will regain its beauty. However he is shocked and indignant upon viewing the portrait, as it now appeared "still loathsome – more loathsome, if possible, than before" (233). He perceives a "look of cunning," as if the portrait now reveals the hypocrisy of his own actions. The further altered appearance causes Dorian to consider whether it had "been merely vanity that had made him do his one good deed." He concedes this possibility, but is also confronted with the blood stain that first appeared when he murdered Basil as being "brighter, and more like blood newly spilled" (233). The deeper, darker blood stain becomes too permanent a scowl from judgment for Dorian; he deduces that his only way out of this circle of judgment is, unsurprisingly by this point, to once again reaffirm judgment. He must "confess" to cause the stain to go away (234).

Dorian's belief that the painted image will *always* appear as conscience, that art would allow this murder to "dog him all his life," and perhaps more so that by this point any attempt at good deeds will be misguided and self-serving, all cause him to conclude that the portrait must therefore be destroyed (234). Once again Dorian violently reacts,

though this time directly at the work of art: when the painting that holds the image of his soul does not produce the effect he wishes to see, but instead confirms this act as still a sin he has committed. Dorian feels that destroying his conscience is the only way to "be at peace" (235). Dorian even mistakenly relates the two acts of violence by grabbing the same weapon he had used to murder Basil to stab the painting, as the narrator asserts for him, "As it had killed the painter, so it would kill the painter's work, and all that that meant" (234). The dagger, the murder of Basil, and his eventual attack on the portrait are all ways Dorian thinks he will "kill" judgment through killing symbol; the narrator states Dorian's belief. Each and every one of Dorian's actions will be reflected in the portrait. Trying to "be good" will not suddenly change the portrait back, nor will it erase the canvas. Instead Dorian will be infinitely frustrated by the portrait's image of himself. Yet the mistake here is, once again, ascribing a use value to the symbol, or in this case, multiple symbols. Dorian believes the portrait is his "soul"; Dorian thought that murdering the painter of the portrait initially was "enough," in that it was symbolic of a murder of the very moral order he wished to escape; finally, as some sort of "doublesymbol," he picks up a dagger that he thinks is symbolic of the use of murdering judgment, both when it killed Basil and now when it will "kill" a painting. Yet finding a use value in these objects, as stated before, misinterprets symbol. A knife does not "kill" or "destroy" judgment in a painting, just as it does not "kill" or "destroy" judgment in a person when he/she put both there to begin with. Dorian can believe it is there, but that does not mean putting a knife in a canvas will produce some great, "life-changing" effect of any kind. Action to either destroy or please the symbol of judgment is a mistake; he could not make the portrait "smile" by this point.

The important thing here is that Dorian's delusion does not actually affect a painting. One can put their soul in art, figuratively, but this does not mean the object *literally* becomes one's soul, and can be treated as such. In short, when art does not produce some desired result, a symbol one believes they see cannot be stabbed and "destroyed" in some fashion that would destroy the symbol. The symbol is not part of the work of art, but put there by the spectator.

The portrait should not be read as a scheming murderer of any sort, as an entity that destroys Dorian intentionally, however. The work of art does not act in the text in any way. Elena Gomel argues that the ending shows an "independent and autonomous objet d' art," but only when both "its creator and its model are dead" (76). In this sense, Gomel feels the text characterizes art as an "implicit personification" that "scheme[s] against the artist, perhaps to the point of murder." In the end, this "murder" of the artist is what Gomel calls the "death of the writer," the "writer" being a split between the person writing the text (writer), and the celebrity the public consumes along with the work (author/Wilde) (90-91). There is an "inevitable split" and also an "impossibility of their complete separation" between the two entities; Dorian can kill the "writer" Basil, but the "author" Basil is discussed long after his supposed "disappearance" (Dorian Gray 223). This "murder" potentially done by the portrait would seem to grant the work of art some sort of agency; the object only becomes "independent and autonomous" after killing "its creator and model." The work of art means more than just Basil or Dorian, thus its consuming and moving beyond both of them should be no surprise. Yet it is not the case that the portrait *does* anything; Dorian is the one who acts, when he kills the artist or attacks the painting. Basil is the one who acts in painting the portrait. The image on the canvas itself does not "kill" anyone at the end; Dorian kills himself, exactly as he intended. The object's uselessness would certainly not have the portrait as "scheming" against Dorian or Basil in any way. The portrait is indifferent to what Dorian and Basil do, how they act to each other. Instead of even an "implicit personification" of the portrait as a murderer, the object is just not part of how Dorian understands judgment or the world around him.

Gomel also argues that Dorian himself attempts to gain the "immortality and immutability of the *objet d' art*," and that his "tragedy is that he succeeds" (80). Her reasoning revolves around her parallel between Faust and Dorian: "Faust does; Prince Charming (Dorian) is." Aside from assigning his human soul to a work of art, Dorian's other fatal error is his attempt to become a work of art himself, hence the "tragedy" of his success. He discovers that being immortal as if he were a portrait is, lo and behold, not desirable, as he himself could never be just an object, just a work of art. Dorian will always feel beholden to judgment, and will always reproduce the same moral order again and again through judgment. Repetition and reproduction of moral order through judgment become something Dorian dreads toward the end of the narrative. When pondering whether or not James Vane or a "mere illusion" accosted him, Dorian is terrified of the thought of his past coming back to haunt him: "What sort of life would his be if, day and night, shadows of his crime were to peer at him from silent corners, to mock him from secret places, to whisper in his ear as he sat at the feast, to wake him with icy fingers as he lay asleep!" (212). The question about his horrifying future is Dorian's growing terror at the thought of this sort of repetition. Judgment is something he begins to feel cannot be escaped. The "shadows" of judgment's glare will always follow him,

and his past actions, which these "shadows" will cause to appear as "crimes," will be repeatedly shown to him as a series of images that he will always view as judging him. If he is truly to live Lord Henry's "new Hedonism," then he could not possibly continue to repeat any sensual or decadent events, like a "feast," with his past "crime" whispering to him and calling itself a "crime." The last clause furthers his terror; when Dorian is awake he repeats decadence, but he fears his past most when he would try to escape from it in his sleep. The "crime" is a "shadow" or a "whisper," both from dark places, when he is conscious. Yet when asleep, his crime does more than block out light or speak to him; it actually physically *touches* him there. Unconsciousness makes him most susceptible to judgment. When Dorian sleeps and dreams, he cannot hide from the reality of his crime, and its "shadows" come at him full-force when he is most vulnerable. He can try to hide judgment in the attic, but it will still find him, as an image when he is awake, and as an actual hand in his sleep. Judgment will remain a repetition, constantly serving as a reminder of his inescapable morality.

Thus judgment in this specific configuration in the text inhibits creation of the new. Whether it manifest as an image or a hand, it always manifests itself to Dorian. Art can create the new, and this act of creation is in no way a use value, since the object does not work into any configuration of judgment itself, even if the spectator believes it does. This is the main reason for the "yellow book" in the text: to show that the new is created for Dorian by an aesthetic object, or "no less than nine" of the same object. The book makes Dorian "unconscious" of the world around him because it removes him from it, shows him something new, even if it seems to be a narrative containing himself. This is the same thing the portrait could be doing, as well: if Dorian were to look at the canvas as

"useless," he would cease to see judgment in the image completely, would instead see just a painting that is "quite useless" the same way the book is.

The portrait shows art as something that can at least be misconstrued as judge, however; the "evil and aging face on the canvas" can double as showing both the aging of Dorian's soul and the disapproval of judgment. Dorian is incapable of ever actually appearing what he thinks is judge in the image of his own face. Dorian cannot move beyond judgment because, even when he does not judge those around him, he judges himself most of all.<sup>22</sup> No "new mode of existence" can come out of Dorian's understanding of the use he sees in the image on the canvas. He understands the portrait as a sinner; he persistently views it as "conscience," thus viewing it as an image permanently scowling at him, disapproving of his actions.

Yet right after contemplating the sin of murdering Basil, he begins to almost move away from judgment, finding the portrait "an unjust mirror." If he believes the portrait is judgment, then he at least begins to think of it as a poor judge. He even moves beyond his one potential good deed to an understanding of his "sparing" Hetty Merton as "vanity," "curiosity," and "hypocrisy": in vanity, "he spared [Hetty]," in hypocrisy "he had worn the mask of goodness," and out of curiosity "he had tried the denial of self." Vanity and hypocrisy can both be read as self-serving ends, and clearly make Dorian's good deed actually selfish, only an attempt to get something in return from the portrait. Yet trying asceticism for "curiosity['s]" sake is not necessarily self-serving. There is a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Dorian judges others around him by blaming them or his plight. Dorian's judgment of Sibyl's suicide is first as someone who was wronged, where "She had no right to kill herself," because "It was selfish of her" (114), and then as an art critic, where the suicide becomes the ending to a "wonderful play," as already mentioned.

sense of curiosity in an action simply done on a whim, with no direction; Dorian might not help Hetty, but he also might not help himself. This curiosity is akin to what Lord Henry urges at the beginning of the novel, when he instructs Dorian to "Be always searching for new sensations" (39). For Dorian to always find "new sensations," he also seeks them out of mere curiosity. Thus Lord Henry's maxim actually creates something new. Instead Dorian seeks "new sensations" with mere curiosity as a guiding compass. In a sense, he almost moves beyond judgment, but as mentioned earlier, only in his reactions to other people. Sadly this curiosity never usurps judgment; in the end the portrait is still judge, Dorian the judged.

Lord Henry, on the other hand, in many ways dominates the text with his wit. He persistently speaks in "willful paradox" consistent with his character's "rhetorical pose," as Michael Molino states, and this itself is consistent with how the novel ends...exactly like it begins. The reader goes from Basil exclaiming, "Harry!" when Lord Henry quips that he "[does not] care for brothers" to Dorian shouting, "Harry, you are horrible!" when Lord Henry tells Dorian that his leaving Hetty "as flowerlike as [he] found her" simply induced "a thrill of real pleasure" (26, 222). Yet Lord Henry does more than persistently make everyone shout at him. There is a form these paradoxical aphorisms take that creates the new. Much like the preface to the novel itself, there is no larger moral order the aphoristic judgment works in the service of. If Lord Henry tells someone he broke off a caprice with a woman for a "thrill," this is almost the same thing as the preface claiming, "All art is quite useless." Unlike Dorian's reading of the portrait as an "unjust mirror," both are statements that do not reproduce the same paradigm of action as "sin" over and over. Lord Henry's statement can be reacted to however Dorian likes; Dorian

can reconsider his "good actions" or can conclude that Lord Henry is wrong. The statement Lord Henry made is indifferent to this. The main difference is that Dorian might hit Lord Henry for making something so serious seem so trivial; Lord Henry, unlike the preface, is a human, and as such, is inescapably engrained in the world around him.

Lord Henry tries to sow the seed for Dorian to move past judgment and truly create or find the new. In describing the experience of sin, Lord Henry claims, "The body sins once, and has done with its sin, for action is a mode of purification" (35). He here describes sin as an "experience" that one must move through to come out the other side somehow. By sinning once, apparently the "sinner" will then complete the act and announce, "Well, that wasn't so bad," when they are done. Action is purification. Yet the truth of this statement is undone by observing Dorian's actions throughout the narrative. He feels he "sins" repeatedly and never fully ceases viewing the action as sin. For Dorian sin is a stain, an inscription. Thus it is no wonder that mere "curiosity" is not a sufficient engine for Dorian to produce a new order. All curiosity does is allow him to move from sin to sin, viewing each as a further blemish on his soul.

Yet Lord Henry's aphoristic sayings take on a form beyond what their content may argue for. At least one character in Wilde's work typically speaks in aphorisms that reduce all of life to around ten or twenty carefully chosen though seemingly flippant words. Algernon, in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, is such a character. In the first act, he dismisses marriage in the following way:

I really don't see anything romantic in proposing. It is very romantic to be in love. But there is nothing romantic about a definite proposal. Why, one may

be accepted. One usually is, I believe. Then the excitement is all over. The very essence of romance is uncertainty. *If ever I get married, I'll certainly try to forget the fact (Five Plays* 213, my emphasis).

The italicized bit is the aphorism, the witty saying that reduces the message of its preceding lines to as few words as possible. The genius of Wilde's aphorisms is that they simultaneously make a huge claim that also asks for, and expects, no response. In this example, Algernon essentially states his belief in marriage as an institution being against the very idea of love, and, though something encouraged by society, also something to be avoided. Even if one were to get married, apparently he/she should "try to forget the fact." Yet the form this statement takes, a feeling that one could "forget the fact" that they are married, as if to be married is something so wholly unromantic that it could be forgotten, sounds so offhanded so as to be too casual to be a soap-box tirade. Algernon does not discus marriage; he judges it with no expectations of anything in return.

Very much like Algernon, Lord Henry takes a flippant attitude toward marriage and other societal institutions. Haslam is quite right to point out that the novel ends with the portrait and not Lord Henry (309). Regardless, his "mere words" are not as trivial as a reader today may understand them, as noted in Lucy McDiarmid's piece on Late-Victorian Table-Talk: "London in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a political, financial, and cultural capital, an imperial center, able to concentrate with its own residents alone more power around a table than any other city before or since" (60). In other words, Wilde's aphorisms have serious currency in their setting. However, while McDiarmid chooses to examine the author himself, I feel that Lord Henry's talk deserves more thorough analysis. Lord Henry makes large claims about society while sounding

incredibly flippant. In his quip that "anybody can be good in the country," for instance, due to the fact that "There are no temptations there," he concludes that country life produces the "uncivilized" class (221). The opportunity to be tempted, corrupted, makes one civilized, as if he refers to life as a work of art, or at least what is necessary for good art; "vice and virtue," from the preface, would be necessary for a person to be civilized, in much the same way they are necessary tools for creating a work of art.

Lord Henry does not even really serve a purpose in the narrative. All of the characters who meet a horrible and untimely end in the book serve some larger purpose. Basil is murdered to show that a disappointed spectator always violently attacks the artist. Dorian dies to show the pitfalls of an aestheticism that understands art as revolutionary. Sibyl commits suicide to show the pitfalls of an aestheticism that values art over life. Even her brother James dies to at least further the plot, after reintroducing the specter of guilt into Dorian's life again. Lord Henry might be somewhat ignorant of the world around him by the end (he believes it "is not in...Dorian" to murder after Dorian as much as admits his guilt to him [224]), yet there is no purpose he is supposed to serve anyway. Lord Henry does not fill any role except talk; most of the maxims he espouses to Dorian that are debatably responsible for corrupting the young man could just as easily come from a "yellow book" that Dorian could find in the attic of his grandfather's house. Lord Henry seems to pass judgment all the time; American literature is "dry-goods" for him at a dinner party, and he dismisses Dorian as a murderer (55). Yet this supposed judgment never produces anything; Henry James is not in the next room, ready to defend the honor of American literature. His judgment of Dorian, even more so, produces no effect: Dorian ignores the judgment, Lord Henry just starts petting a "Java parrot," and most

importantly the judgment is plain incorrect. The painting inspires action in Dorian; he sees the image, and immediately acts accordingly, whether it is toward "good actions," hiding the image, or stabbing it with a dagger. Lord Henry's apparent judgments, however, are really just idle talk, or Elfenbein's "series of free speculations" (502).

Before Lord Henry even meets Dorian, he informs Basil how little his talk means: "If one puts forward an idea...he never dreams of considering whether the idea is right or wrong," as "The only thing he considers of any importance is whether one believes it oneself' (27). Not only do we know from here forward that Lord Henry only believes himself, and expects no one else to, but we also know that he values insincerity quite highly when he claims that "sincerity" will taint the idea with "his wants, his desires, or his prejudices." Insincerity more importantly is the exact opposite of what would produce conversation about an "idea": the concept of someone "put[ting] forward an idea" only because one "believe[s] it themselves" has nothing to do with a statement that enters into any broader conversation. In fact Basil himself constantly refuses to take Lord Henry's statements seriously. When Lord Henry says, "Conscience and cowardice are really the same things," the artist's replies, "I don't believe that, Harry, and I don't believe you do, either" (24). The most an aphorism produces from Basil is a statement of negation; he dismisses the aphorism as useless on the grounds that neither party even "believes" it.

Lord Henry reconfigures judgment so that it is no longer moral but aesthetic.

Judgment becomes judgment of a work of art, with the judge fully understanding the work's indifference to the judgment passed. Lord Henry does not overreact to his wife's departure, for example, in any sense. He regrets losing his "worst habit," but this seems

much the same as the Lord Henry earlier in the novel, consoling Dorian over Sibyl's suicide by turning the event into a work of art (224, 115). He turns all of life around him into a work of art, reshaping emotionally tumultuous events until they only speak "to our sense of dramatic effect." Lord Henry is well-practiced at being spectator, or both actor and spectator, as he allows for (115). In the event that his wife leaves him, he acts the part of spectator and actor in a tragedy: he is distraught at the part he had to play out, yet the end of the marriage was both inevitable and also only part of the "play." The event both had to transpire and pass before him, had to emotionally move him as both part of his life and part of a play, the way art should emotionally affect one. Yet the event of his wife's departure does not pass a judgment on either Lord Henry or Victoria: Victoria does not become anything more than a "bad habit," and Lord Henry only "regrets" the loss of this. Once again, neither party owes anything; only the intensity of the experience produces emotion in Lord Henry. None of these judgments will cause Victoria to return to him; she is long gone. Instead of judgment being wired to reproduce moral order, it is now re-imagined as the judge being a spectator to a play, or at a gallery viewing. Lord Henry can judge his wife leaving him all day, the same way Dorian could judge a painting. Lord Henry's wife will still not return, just as Dorian's portrait will not accept Dorian's disappointment. The aesthetic object is indifferent, and Lord Henry understands this.

Lord Henry does not act to prevent the end of his marriage and could even be said to have caused it. In the above passage he does not question why she left to pass judgment on her, nor does he ponder what he may have done to cause her to leave. He instead moves on to continue to think of life "artistically," which he says makes one's

"brain...his heart" (226). To treat one's heart as one's brain is to consider life as art, and thus as useless, as a series of free speculations like Lord Henry's speech. In this chapter, which immediately precedes Dorian's unintentional suicide, Lord Henry is beyond judgment, beyond sin, beyond the soul. In his story about a street preacher asking a crowd to consider the price of their souls, Lord Henry postulates (to Dorian, not the preacher and crowd) that "art had a soul, but that man had not" (226-27). In the end, however, he feels that the preacher would "not have understood me" had he made such a pronouncement out loud. The preacher can still connect with their "sickly white faces" because they believe in the soul, believe in God as the judge, and believe that the order of sin must be undone and replaced with an order of the soul, whatever that would be. What that order would take the form of exactly is not important. What is important is that the priest's question, "What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose...his own soul?" is something that can be addressed to them. This question itself is able to judge the crowd; they fear the judgment of God's proclamation that they have lost their souls. They therefore fear an order that would undo their souls. Lord Henry, on the other hand, is beyond this. Dorian throws his lot in with the crowd; he believes the soul is a "terrible reality," and is convinced that the preacher is right. Lord Henry tells his companion that "it must be an illusion," as "The things one feels absolutely certain about are never true." With this statement, Lord Henry not only understands the useless, but also returns to his original statement about truth in the opening chapters. Conviction, the belief that something is true, still envelops one in revolution and judgment. Insincerity, the act of simply letting fly with another moment of "free speculation," is indifferent to these things. Lord Henry does not even speak his judgment in the above scene, as it

would have no use to claim that art has a "soul." The crowd would not have "understood."

Frequently when Lord Henry speaks, he simply reacts to others, but does not actually contribute to the conversation. When he tells a politician that he does not "desire to change anything in England except the weather," the other luncheon guests react by claiming, "But we have such grave responsibilities" (57). Lord Henry's joke is still taken seriously, so he replies with yet another joke, quipping, "Humanity takes itself too seriously." These statements are just reactions; they take no other form other than to try and not produce and cut down production. "Humanity takes itself too seriously" is just supposed to cut off the conversation, not create new discussion. Even a name or label of some kind would staple a use to Lord Henry, would fix him to being expected to always produce what the label entails. When Dorian dubs him "Prince Paradox," he exclaims, "From a label there is no escape," wishing to refuse the nickname (206). Lord Henry detests this name; he would be "Prince Paradox," expected to speak paradoxically, when in reality he speaks very clearly. There is nothing paradoxical, for instance, about claiming that the soul is an illusion, just as there is nothing confusing in claiming that humanity takes itself "too seriously." Both statements take very little work to decipher; he means what he says. More importantly, a label would prohibit his production of the new; being "Prince Paradox" would mean he must always produce paradox. His speech is not designed to add up to political action or revolution, in much the same way that he cannot accept a title that would label him as someone who always produces the same. These would be the traps of the old form of judgment.

When the guests at a luncheon fail to understand Lord Henry's meaning in saying he only wants to change England's "weather," they interpret it as they wish to; they all have "grave responsibilities," though what those are and how those energies should be directed is not specified. His claim that he only wishes to change the "weather," however, produces no larger political use; one, Lord Henry cannot actually do anything about the weather, and two, even if he could it would have no effect on the "East End," or any other form of political use (56). Changing the weather would, however, be something new, unlike a discussion of our "grave responsibilities" that direct everyone straight back to political action. Lord Henry is really saying that political action, revolution, and judgment of a moral stripe are all ways to reproduce the same order. A "renewed" direction for political action will simply reconnect the energies of that action with a new configuration of order. The problem "of the East End" that the luncheon guests discuss is simply a new place to direct order, to impose politics and bureaucracy elsewhere. None of this produces anything new; it only refocuses the same order. To really only care about the "weather" ignores political action. At least a focus on the trivial, the weather, would produce something new, presumably a less cloudy and dreary London. Dorian's mistake with the portrait is the same as the luncheon guests taking Lord Henry seriously. Dorian would have to do as Lord Henry, view the work of art as simply that: a beautiful portrait that actually shows the different stages of what could be considered Dorian's soul.

Yet in the end the portrait, and not Lord Henry, receives the last word. The reader is left with a portrait that does manage to produce the new; after showing the ravages Dorian causes to his own soul, the painting returns to its original form. Through

ekphrasis Wilde shows, without telling, the reader what the useless looks like. Telling would be giving Lord Henry the last word, yet whatever summary of the preceding events he might have would be spoken by someone who is not as removed from Dorian's plight as the portrait is. A human being cannot be fully useless, much less quite useless. Lord Henry has a wife that can leave him; a work of art does not. He can never be fully removed from revolution or judgment, which is why in the end he even judges himself. He is ecstatic that Dorian has "never produced anything" besides himself, as "Life has been your art" (228). Lord Henry has only produced aging. The things he fears, aging and mortality, hang over his head heavily. He cries to Dorian that he has "sorrows...of my own, that even you know nothing of," these sorrows being the "tragedy of old age" (227-28). Even at this point in the narrative he still believes that the body can be judged; human flesh and its mortality is the last inescapable shell beyond which a human being would become quite useless. Dorian's agelessness to Lord Henry is still, as it was at the beginning of the novel, "the type of what the age is searching for," still something refreshing to him (228). To Lord Henry, agelessness would be the completion of his own project: an ageless Lord Henry would be quite useless in a way beyond his aphorisms. He would also be physically past judgment and revolution; his conversation would continue to be nothing but a series of "free speculations," aphorisms meant more to be heard than replied to, but he would also possess the immortal beauty of a work of art. He succeeds in the many ways Dorian fails, yet also fails in the one thing Dorian succeeds at.

Lord Henry however understands the uselessness of art as either judge or judged that Dorian fails to grasp. To treat art as revolutionary is to believe it spurs one to action that is directed toward replacing order. He disagrees with both Dorian and the narrator

when he states that "Art has no influence upon action" and that it is "superbly sterile" in that it "annihilates the desire to act" (229). 23 The "action" Lord Henry refers to reproduces moral order through judgment. There is even something sexual in the use he describes in this brand of action. The action of configuring oneself with revolution and order is sexual in nature, is a response to desire that produces use and thus the same; art is not "sterile" in that it does not create an emotional response, but "sterile" in that art does not solve the problems of the "East End." Art causes its spectator to pass judgment that produces no aim; even if Dorian wants to claim that a book is "poison," this does not make the book actually become poisonous. This judgment by the spectator simply will not be repaid by the work of art. Lord Henry even tells Dorian that it is "no use" to "moralize" about art and literature, in response to the "poisoning" the young man finds in the yellow book. Dorian should not moralize, after all; he is "too delightful to do that," too immortally beautiful to waste the energies of his desires connecting himself to order. Art is not to be judged as "good/bad," as something that needs moral order to guide it. Rather the spectator judges art, as a figure that passes before the work and passes its own new form of judgment, new because the work is indifferent to the judgment. Each judgment created will be new in some fashion and accord with the spectator in different ways. Hence Dorian's numerous copies of one book: each copy suits a "different mood," and another useless judgment. If Dorian judges a book as "immoral," this will not spur a book to action, will not cause the literary object to change in any fashion. It is merely there to be judged as a work of art by a spectator, where the judgment will not fold back into any kind of order, but rather cause the work to create something new each time.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Dorian reminds Lord Henry, "you poisoned me with a book once" at this point in the novel, just as the narrator states, at the end of Chapter Eleven, that Dorian "had been poisoned by a book" (159).

His last words to Dorian, and also his last words in the novel, are, "The park is quite lovely now," in reference to where he wants Dorian to meet him the next day, and, "I don't think there have been such lilacs since the year I met you" (230). Though Lord Henry does not get the last word in the novel, these are the last words he speaks, and there is significance to his final statement being about flowers, the very sensual pleasure he originally found Dorian burying his face in in Basil's garden minutes before the youth became ageless. Years later, after Dorian explored desire uninhibited and is left with no physical scars, Lord Henry considers the same thing again: an agelessly beautiful object that will "cure the soul by means of the senses." These must be Lord Henry's last words because he looks at the wrong object; Dorian is not "quite useless," cannot be simply equated with the flowers, but very much the opposite. In the end Lord Henry is incredibly close to being quite useless, but misses out on this distinction, humorously enough, by being deprived of an audience with a work of art. If he had seen the painting, it still seems doubtful that he could have saved Dorian; the entire novel functions by showing the difficulty of moving away from judgment, order, revolution, and morality in understanding art. Yet at least Lord Henry would have understood why Dorian really did feel he could be "poisoned" by any work of art, and would have also realized that the painting, and Dorian, had remained the work of art all along. As it stands, however, Lord Henry continues to pair his friend with the lilacs. Lord Henry's mistake is not in enjoying the lilacs in the park; it is in a belief that the real work of art is not still hiding in the attic and being deceived by Dorian's beauty.

In the final chapter, the preface restores the work of art to its rightful place. It would be wrong to say that the preface returns to "judge" Dorian, or to enact revenge of

some kind; the preface, speaking for the work of art, is completely indifferent. The preface is the voice that the portrait is allowed to have in the novel; it specifies exactly why a work of art is opposed to traditional notions of revolution. The work of art is a "fiction of belief," as Rachel Albow calls it, because art "can make us experience not just our beliefs but our pains and pleasures as if they were not entirely our own" (181). The portrait cannot be stabbed. Dorian fails to appreciate his own belief as fiction, and becomes subject to what Ellmann refers to as the "vindictive image" in the novel (311). If Ellmann gets something wrong, it is in his analogy. Dorian is not the "father" with the portrait as the "son." Rather the portrait is removed from the human world; it does not "turn[s] upon" Dorian, but rather does what it was already going to do.

The "moral" in the novel, then, is not only that literature is "out of the reach of morals," as Gilbert claims in "The Critic as Artist," but is also the only tool through which humanity can produce something new (112). All other tools, including a human being, are bound up in use and productive judgment. Even James Vane and our reading of him are bound up in judgment; it is only true that Dorian wronged his sister and deserves to be murdered if we take the position of judge. If we do as Wilde asks us to, which is to take the position of Lord Henry and allow the event to influence our emotions, however, we see how stumped we would be without useful judgment. The novel's test is to see if a reader could possibly convert themselves to believe what Lord Henry says about Sibyl's death: her suicide is not "sad," but a "wonderful play," a beautiful work of art. She is, after all, not real. Nor are any of the characters, or the events unfolding. Wilde challenges his reader throughout: do we read by judging Lord

Henry and what he says at the outset, finding a "new Hedonism" to be either a monstrous or fantastic idea? Or do we defer judgment and actually try to take seriously anything that he says? If we do take him seriously, we might not like the result, but that is beside the point. The important thing to be drawn from the work is that literature produces these new ways of considering judgment. This is why Wilde insists in the preface, "Vice and virtue are to the artist materials for an art' (18). For Wilde there is no difference whatsoever between what humanity calls vice or virtue. They are both "materials" the artist creates a work of art with. The quite useless is really the only way to create anything new. The new for Wilde cannot come through reuse of the same tools in our understanding of the world. This is why the preface truly demands attention in the novel. The epigrams that detail what it means for a work of art to be useless are, in many ways, how to produce the new through reading literature. The aphorism, unlike the visible symbol Dorian so often misreads, produces the new by not being owed anything in return, or owing anything to someone else. The new is, as Lord Henry puts it, the desire to do nothing politically but instead "change the weather." Just like viewing a painting in a gallery, the new takes the form of being a judgment passed about the painting as one views it, yet the relationship between spectator and painting is not predicated on production. It is not "moralizing" in a way that should lead to action, but telling humanity to stop taking itself "too seriously."

If Wilde makes a claim with this novel that is seemingly too grand (which he does), then it is that literature is the only way a society will ever develop. When we were children, we were always told a "need" was different from a "want," and were led to understand that a "want" was something superfluous, while a "need" was useful and

necessary to keep us alive; food was a need, while a coloring book was a want. The importance of being quite useless for Wilde is the opposite: literature is something a society desperately *wants* in order to develop and thrive. We could get by just fine without *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and that's the entire point. Order and judgment could persist, as needs that serve ends will persist, and the book would not care. We *want the book*, however, and should want it. The book that serves no purpose shows us something besides reproduction of the same.

It is also not "quite" enough that we should want or desire a book, no matter how flippantly or desperately. We should *demand* the book we want. It is not merely "quite useless" meaning "fairly useless" in that the novel is indifferent to action, indifferent to the world around us; it is also "quite useless" as "extremely useless," to the point that we should desperately want the useless. Reading *Dorian Gray* does not confirm ideology, or fold thought back into any form of transcendence that would allow the reading to become a version of a need, or a "useful" thing yet again. Rather its insistence on its uselessness is the demand that the book cannot become useful, cannot confirm or reconfirm anything, other than itself. The book, much like Dorian's portrait, cannot remain a fixed ideology, a fixed useful tool of any kind. Thus *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is not "just" about any one thing: the book is about books, and their insistence on never fitting into one configuration. Really, if Dorian got one thing right, it is his owning "no less than nine" copies of one book (141). Why would he own that many copies? Because they are "quite useless" and just sit on the book shelf.

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