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The Human Nature and the Gothic: The Character Depiction in *The Picture of Dorian Gray**

İnsan Doęası ve Gotik: Dorian Gray'in Portresi'nde Karakter Tasviri

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Abstract

This article examines the Gothic aspect of Oscar Wilde's only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. By using Gothic's theoretical framework by Robert Hume, this article presents a thorough analysis of the Gothic setting and elements in line with the narrative's main characters. The paper argues that Wilde uses Gothic elements and setting as significant tools to shed light on human nature and criticize Victorian society's way of life. The article first discusses London's double-sided and hypocritical nature in the book, followed by an analysis of the portrait's supernatural aspect and the conflict between good and evil as part of the settings chapter. The second chapter involves a detailed discussion of the narrative's Gothic elements, including horror and terror, homoeroticism, and an obsession with youth and beauty. It is asserted that Wilde purposefully created figures in a Gothic style to convey the evil in Victorian society by giving his characters distinctively corrupted looks within that normative structure. Basil Hallward's homoerotic remarks turn him into a corrupted character, whilst Lord Henry Wotton's fixation with beauty makes him a foul character. Under the influence of these two personalities, Dorian represents all the tainted elements of Victorian society. In conclusion, the paper explores how Wilde uses the three major characters to highlight the inherent flaws in Victorian society's social structure. Dorian Gray's capacity for adaptation and Basil Hallward and Lord Henry Wotton's debased personas are the two main aspects of human nature that Wilde denounce throughout the novel.

Keywords: Human nature, The Picture of Dorian Gray, Oscar Wilde, Corruption, Victorian Society

Öz

Bu makalenin amacı Oscar Wilde'in romanı Dorian Gray'in Portresi'nin Gotik özelliklerini, romanın karakterleri üzerinden tahlil etmektir. Bu doğrultuda Gotik edebiyatını teorize eden öncü isimlerden Robert Hume'un fikirleri çalışmaya metodolojik bir çerçeveye kazandırmaktadır. Bu çalışmayı oluşturan ana argümanlar, Wilde'in Viktorya dönemi toplumunun yaşam biçimini ve normatif yapısını eleştirmek adına Gotik edebiyatın belirli özelliklerini kullanması üzerinden şekillenmiştir. Bu da Wilde'in insan doğasına dair yaptığı eleştirileri kuvvetli bir düzleme taşımaktadır. Bu makale ilk bölümünde eserin yapısal özelliklerini oluşturan unsurların Gotik yanlarını tartışmaktadır. Bunun için evvela eser içerisinde Londra'nın ikili yaşamı teşvik eden iki yüzlü yapısı incelenmiştir. Sonrasında Dorian Gray'in portresinin gerçek üstü özellikleri ve eserde baskın bir mefhum olan iyi-kötü arasındaki çekişme masaya yatırılmıştır. Bir sonraki bölüm ise anlatı içerisinde baskın bir yere sahip olan Gotik elementlerin karakterler bağlamında bir analizini içerir. Bu minvalde ilk olarak korku ve dehşet, sonrasında homoerotizm ve son olarak da güzelliğe olan düşkünlük tartışılmıştır. Bu tartışmalar sırasında Wilde'in bu üç karakteri özellikle Gotik bir şekilde yarattığı, bu karakterlerin her birinin Viktorya dönemi toplumunun kötü ve yozlaşmış bir yanını kişileştirdikleri iddia edilmiştir. Basil Hallward'ın homoerotik söylemleri onu Viktorya döneminin normatif yapısı içerisinde yozlaşmış kılarken Lord Henry Wotton'u bozan özelliği ise mütemediyen güzelliğe tapınmasıdır. Bu iki karakterin etkisi altında kalan Dorian Gray ise Viktorya toplumunun kötü özelliklerini yansıtmaya başlar. Sonuç olarak bu makale Wilde'in bu üç karakteri kullanarak nasıl Viktorya döneminin ahlak anlayışını ve yaşam biçimini eleştirdiğini incelemektedir. Dorian Gray'in etkisi altında kaldığı sosyal etkileşimleri bire bir özümsemesi, Basil Hallward ve Lord Henry Wotton'un ise yozlaşmış karakterleri Wilde'in mütemediyen eleştiriye maruz bıraktığı insan doğasına ait özelliklerdir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İnsan Doğası, Dorian Gray'in Portresi, Oscar Wilde, Yozlaşma, Viktorya Toplumu

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INTRODUCTION

The Picture of Dorian Gray, hereafter *Dorian Gray*, is a towering example of Gothic literature. It follows Dorian Gray, who is enchanted by his own captivating portrait that his friend Basil Hallward depicted. After Lord Henry Wotton manipulates him, Dorian trades his soul for eternal youth and beauty. Dorian then falls into an immoral way of living a double life, indulging his desires in private while remaining a gentleman in the eyes of society. As his picture starts to reflect the imprints of his corruption, he loses the ability to sustain this double life. At this point, he seeks solace in stabbing the portrait as a desperate act of ceasing the traces of his corrupt way of life but ultimately kills himself, too.

Many critics, such as Joseph Carroll and Don D'Amassa, argue that *Dorian Gray* is a book that reveals specific characteristics of human nature (Carroll, 2015: 288). In the book, the characters tend to get corrupted or embrace a changing and adaptive quality to social environments for their benefit, which is revealed through the Gothic characteristics of the narrative (D'Amassa, 2006: 274). Therefore, inspired by this feature of the book, 'revealing human nature through Gothic features,' this research question is formulated to be tackled throughout the essay: "To what extent are the prominent characters' nature in *Dorian Gray* depicted through Gothic settings and elements?" Although many characters in the narrative are worth analyzing and exploring, Basil, Henry, and Dorian stand out, as they all resemble each other in some ways and share common corrupted attributions. Therefore, in this study, 'prominent characters of the narrative' will only refer to Basil, Henry, and Dorian.

Gothically portraying his characters allows Wilde to reveal that human beings are inclined to be corrupted. In addition to corruption, through the protagonist Dorian, Wilde shows humans embrace an ever-changing dynamic, which helps them adapt to different social environments (Kennedy, 2020: 3). Here, Gothic elements and settings function as literary devices Wilde use to trace and emphasize Dorian's trajectory from innocence to corruption with others' influence. They aid in envisioning this movement and strengthen the reader's sense of the tension between morality and immorality within characters. As Dorian changes for the worse under other characters' influence while adopting an adaptive quality to navigate social interactions, the presence of the Gothic intensifies in the text. This changing dynamic allows Dorian to hide his corruption from Victorian society and remain a 'gentleman,' even though he goes against society's moral codes. This creates a dichotomy between appearance and reality, which manifests within the novel with the help of the Gothic elements and settings and further reveals the characterization of human nature.

In *Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde creates different layers for his narrative. At the first layer, it appears as though he merely conveys the tragic tale of a young man. However, underneath this layer, there lies a substantial denouncement of the way Victorian society navigated social interactions and day-to-day life. By detailing the indulgence in pleasure, the hedonist lifestyle, and the hypocritical norms of society, Oscar Wilde subtly vilifies the morality standards and virtues of the time (Manganiello, 1983: 30).

Many literary studies have attempted and succeeded to map out the prominent features of these characters. Sheldon Liebman's "Character Design in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*" is one of the most encompassing studies about this book and will be used as one of the secondary sources in this study. This influential article investigates the intricate relationship between the prominent characters and how Wilde crafted them to convey his criticisms. However, we tried to distinguish this article from the other studies by linking specific corrupted attributions to each prominent character. This essay argues that Wilde's portrayal of characters through the Gothic lens demonstrates that all the prominent characters' nature contains corruption. Along with corruption, Dorian's nature has an ever-changing character dynamic. This 'adaptive' quality helps him navigate different social environments as he changes for the worse.

METHODOLOGY

This study focuses on how the Gothic setting & elements help depict the predominant characters' nature through the analysis of the text with close reading and employing Robert Hume's theoretical framework about the essentials of Gothic literature. Undoubtedly, *Dorian Gray* is one of the most acclaimed narratives in academia that illustrates the Victorian mode of life. As this article will also touch on a variety of issues about Victorian society's corruption, examining the book's Gothic properties can help us understand Wilde's purposeful choice of placing these three characters at the forefront of the criticisms concerning this society.

In the first section, the establishment of the Gothic setting will be analyzed by examining the usage of place, the supernatural aspect, and the conflict between good and evil. The following section will delve into the Gothic elements of horror and terror, homoeroticism, and the obsession with youth and beauty and how they manifest themselves in the narrative. Ultimately, the last section will highlight the relationship between the atmosphere, the elements, and the characters' nature. This study is crucial to discuss because it not only grants a more comprehensive detailing of Wilde's characters, but it also aims to shed light on how these characters personify the evil within Victorian society with specific corrupted features. In this context, it will be argued that Lord Henry Wotton's obsession with beauty makes him a corrupted character, whereas Basil Hallward's homoerotic utterances lead him to corruption. Dorian, with the influence of these two, embodies all the corrupted aspects of Victorian society. With these three characters, Wilde shows what is essentially wrong with Victorian society's means of navigating social life.

GOTHIC AS A LITERARY GENRE AND A THEOREM

With Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, the Gothic genre found its place in literature in 1764. Walpole deliberately chose this title as the castle in question referred to an abstract evil and allured to a sense of terror, which are the significant elements that form the overall setting and atmosphere of the novel. The setting in Walpole's novel is dominantly gloomy, and there are abundant properties of Gothic literature within the book, such as haunted stairways and castles, secret panels, ghost stories, and supernatural occurrences. After this Gothic tale about a love tragedy and the downfall of a family, the Gothic became a popular means for criticizing social issues. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* denounce certain aspects of social structures, along with presenting stories decorated with gloomy atmospheres and/or supernatural characteristics (Jackson, 2018: 51). While Gothic literature is often used to criticize societal norms, as evident from the abovementioned narratives, its significance as a literary genre extends beyond that. By exposing society's repressed fears, Gothic narratives aim to raise societal awareness about those fears.

Although certain characteristics like haunted stairways or dark prophecies remain significant features of Gothic literature in conveying underlying messages, Robert Hume articulates that besides those certain characteristics, Gothic is also a matter of style (Hume, 1969: 284). According to him, Gothic literature's main and most essential components can be listed as follows: First, there needs to be moral norms present in the society in which the story occurs. Therefore, the reader can measure the protagonist's acts against pre-determined morality standards to witness their change. The second component is the action derived from a complex of villain-hero. Thus, the atmosphere aligns with the protagonist and becomes "fearsome and profoundly ambiguous," just like the villain (Hume, 1969: 287). Gothic literature's third and most important feature is the confusion of evil and good throughout the narrative (Hume, 1969: 287). These features reinforce the idea that *Dorian Gray* has a place in the Gothic movement.

IDENTIFYING THE GOTHIC SETTINGS EMBEDDED IN THE NOVEL

The Usage of the City

Dorian Gray takes place in London in the late 19th century. The narrative has two central locations: the wealthy West end and the decrepit East end of London. Although no gloomy castles and haunted stairways dominate the setting, this crucial distinction between the two ends of London adds a Gothic characteristic to the novel (Abrams & Harpham, 2015: 152). The author depicts these two ends as if they are entirely different cities, although both of them are parts of London. The people in the West and their social status dramatically differ from those in the East. Even the atmosphere depiction differs, which not only contributes to the novel's Gothic atmosphere but also criticizes the drastic inequality in Victorian society.

The West side of London, Mayfair, welcomes elegant gatherings. People who belong to the West end gossip about any action that can go against the pre-determined morality frames of Victorian society (Svobodova, 2016: 22). According to Susie Steinbach, these norms include being a faithful Christian, not having intercourse outside marriage, etc. (4-6). Therefore, in Mayfair, presenting oneself as 'civilized' and following these norms are vital.

However, the other end of London offers places to indulge in 'immoral' actions, such as institutions offering premarital intercourse and people selling opium. Dorian and some of his respectable

youth friends he deceived use this site of London to partake in forbidden pleasures, for the morality frame of Victorian society does not permit them to indulge in these actions openly (Svobodova, 2016: 24).

When illustrating the moon on the East side of London, Wilde uses the dark simile of “yellow skull” (Wilde, 2013: 146), which not only represents the gloominess of the East side of London’s atmosphere but also indirectly signals the underside of its moral life. This is reinforced by the sinister “black web” (Wilde, 2013: 146) of streets, which lures people into a world of corruption. Wilde’s use of language is an essential hint in understanding this place’s Gothic aspect. He deliberately depicts this place in a negative light, as opposed to his depiction of the West side of London, to convey that corruption and its influence will be detrimental if one ends up here.

Accordingly, the two distinct ends of London and the hypocritical meaning attributed to the city support the Gothic setting of the novel. Distinct ends display Victorian society’s double-sided life as the ‘respectable’ citizens of Mayfair visit this site, bluntly going against the morality frames but remaining respectable citizens on the other side of the city.

The Portrait and the Supernatural Atmosphere

The Gothic significance of *Dorian Gray* cannot be fully understood without taking into account the central supernatural aspect of the narrative. It is Basil’s painting of Dorian Gray that plays a crucial role in creating this supernatural element, thus making the narrative more impactful and transporting the reader into a fantastical realm.

In the beginning, the portrait is seen as a classic painting that embraces the immense beauty of Dorian. Then, Dorian begins to acknowledge his beauty by hearing Henry’s following statements about the vitality of remaining young and beautiful: “Because you have the most marvellous youth, and youth is the only thing worth having” (Wilde, 2013: 24).

At this point, the ever-changing character dynamic within Dorian’s nature begins to appear, and he starts to lose his innocence to the obsession with youth and beauty. Finally, after realizing that beauty may be the sole thing in life worth having, he utters the following statement: “If it were I who always be young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that I would give everything!” (Wilde, 2013: 28). Dorian’s wishes come true, and he trades his soul for everlasting youth and beauty. However, the painting starts demonstrating how Dorian’s soul is corrupted by every wicked and immoral thing he indulges in, such as provoking others to smoke opium with him. This feature of the picture contributes to the gloomy and Gothic atmosphere throughout the book as it changes (Oates, 1980: 424). “For every sin he committed, a stain would fleck and wreck its [the portrait] fairness” (Wilde, 2013: 89). This portrait also acts as a measure of Dorian’s corruption as the portrait changes for the worse and becomes ‘ugly’ within the norms of Victorian society; therefore, it causes a particular fear within ‘beautiful’ Dorian. With the presence of the portrait in the narrative, there is an evident blurring of the line between appearance and reality. Thus, the supernatural aspect of the portrait and its ability to reflect the immoral flaws of Dorian helps form the gloomy and Gothic atmosphere and raises horror and terror in Dorian.

The Conflict between Good and Evil in Victorian Society

The conflict between good and evil is one of the main components of the book. This conflict not only unveils Dorian and other characters’ corruption throughout the novel but also hints at the normative structure of Victorian society through the representations of Basil and Henry.

As Dorian reminds Basil, “each of us has Heaven and Hell in him” (Wilde, 2013: 1890: 151), illustrating the potential of both the good and evil in oneself. Both Basil and Henry pick a side in this compass of ‘heaven’ and ‘hell.’ For instance, Basil utters, “Pray Dorian, pray (...) Lead us not into temptation. Forgive our sins. Wash away our iniquities.” (Wilde, 2013: 151). As this remark reveals, Basil believes in a higher order, which reveals itself in the moment of terror and is distant from self-centered ideologies, unlike Henry. But, on the other hand, the Duchess at a gathering utters, “Good-bye Lord Henry, you are quite delightful, and dreadfully demoralizing.” (Wilde, 2013: 43). Therefore, it is possible to articulate that Henry is known for his ‘demoralizing’ aspect in Victorian society.

Basil represents the good in Victorian society with his characteristic feature of admiring beauty; on the other hand, Henry illustrates the bad with his deceiving theories and immoral statements (Liebman, 1999: 311). When Dorian first meets Henry, Basil explicitly states how Lord Henry has a “very bad influence over all his friends” (Wilde, 2013: 20).

Basil perceives the detrimental energy radiating from Henry and wishes to preserve the innocent Dorian from this energy. Dorian's corruption throughout the chapters vividly illustrates this conflict. As Dorian moves away from Basil's somewhat good influence and approaches Henry's teachings, he forfeits his touch with his innocent side (Svobodova, 2016: 27).

While Basil remains a pure character in certain aspects, Henry continuously states: "We are not sent into the world to air our moral prejudices" (Wilde, 2013: 72). His comments and those around him reveal that Henry is someone who does not live his life following societal norms; therefore, he may personify the 'bad' within Victorian society. Once Dorian familiarizes himself with Henry's ideologies, such as the idea that society's morality frames are nowhere near important, he increases his visits to the decrepit East of London, which reveals the strong impact of the setting on the characters.

Before Dorian becomes utterly evil, he says that Basil "annoys" him by "giving him good advice" (Wilde, 2013: 55). Then, Dorian stops seeing Basil and minimizes his contact with him. Consequently, excluding Basil's influence on his life, Dorian also picks his side. As Dorian gradually becomes evil, moves toward Henry's ideals, and reveals the changing dynamic within human nature, the atmosphere becomes darker and gloomier.

GOTHIC ELEMENTS OF THE NARRATIVE

Along with the Gothic setting, another aspect of the narrative vastly influences the way characters are depicted: the Gothic elements. However, the Gothic imageries in *Dorian Gray* are connected, and the way they emerge in the novel vastly depends on the setting. This section will analyze the Gothic elements in the novel and highlight their relationship with the setting and characters.

Horror and Terror

The characters often find themselves in horror throughout the novel, contributing to the portrayal of the characters as this element displays the characters' instinctual reactions to certain Gothic events in the narrative (Svobodova, 2016: 39).

One of the most notable instances in the text that exemplifies the presence of this Gothic element is the horror that Dorian feels when he faces the risk of someone else seeing the alteration in the portrait: "The portrait must be hidden away at all costs. He could not run such a risk of discovery again" (Wilde, 2013: 115). This illustrates that Dorian witnesses the corruption of his soul, and the portrait's ability to mirror all his illicit indulgences fills him with sheer horror. Thus, he attempts to hide this corrupted side of his soul and tries to flee from the horror that the portrait creates.

Another demonstration in this regard is the horror Basil radiates when he first witnesses the decaying soul of Dorian through the portrait: "His hand shook, and the candle fell from its socket on the floor, and lay there sputtering (...) he buried his face in his hands" (Wilde, 2013: 151). Once Basil sees that his work reflects the destruction of Dorian's innocent and beautiful soul, he is filled with horror and remorse because he drew the portrait. While darkness takes over the atmosphere, the picturesque imagery of a 'sputtering candle' seems to represent the little goodness left in Basil as he feels remorseful.

As in Basil's case, a surrounding horror emerges within the characters when they witness the possibility of death. For instance, when Dorian visits poverty-stricken East London, he encounters James Vane, the brother of Sibyl Vane, whom Dorian causes her suicide. When James threatens to kill him for what he's done to his sister, Dorian "paralyzes with terror" (Wilde, 2013: 183), meaning that the possibility of death fills him with horror, providing an explicit representation of the usage of the Gothic elements.

Homoeroticism

In the Gothic genre, authors often write about taboo subjects, such as the corruption of the soul or sexual interactions (Sanna, 2012: 22). As a Gothic author, Oscar Wilde implements such an arousing element in *Dorian Gray* to support the gloomy setting and the characters' depiction: Homoerotic undertones. First used by Sigmund Freud, homoeroticism indicates the sexual desire between same-sex individuals, and it differentiates it from homosexuality as it means the sexual orientation of an individual (Bergeret, 2017: 352).

While it is perceived as immoral by Victorian society, the characters cannot resist homoerotic interactions, revealing the dichotomy between the individual's desires and the norms presented by

society. Furthermore, since homosexuality is taboo in Dorian's society, this element acts as another igniter of the characters' corruption as they cannot resist this 'morally wrong' instinct.

Even though there are no explicit homosexual scenes in the book, there are substantial implications for homoeroticism. The aesthetic statements, often uttered by Basil and Henry, do not differentiate gender. If one sees beauty, one talks about it, despite gender. This adds a Gothic aspect to the portrayal of the characters since the suppressed sexualities of the characters are seen as taboo. Still, the characters' remarks normalize them (Sanna, 2012: 23). Therefore, these homoerotic imageries act as a Gothic element that depicts the corruption of the characters within this conjuncture.

For instance, even though Basil's sexual background is not explicit, we comprehend the tension between him and Dorian as Basil explains how he is "dominated, soul, brain, and power" by Dorian. Basil further reveals that he "worshipped" Dorian and "grew jealous" of everyone to whom he spoke (Wilde, 2013: 110).

Basil implies that he feels a somewhat sexual and/or romantic attraction toward Dorian (Carroll, 2005: 92). However, he never puts this attraction into clear, concise sentences as it is clearly against the morality standards put forward by Victorian society (Leonard, 2019: 140).

Likewise, Dorian's way of threatening Alan Campbell, another youth friend with whom he had fun, contains a homoerotic undertone. Even though Dorian's reckless youth days were filled with different types of immoral activities, those with Campbell threaten Campbell's social status. When Alan refuses to take part in Dorian's murder of Basil, Dorian threatens him by passing him a closed note. "Campbell looked at him in surprise and then took up the paper and opened it. As he read it, his face became ghastly pale." (Wilde, 2013: 163). There is an implication that they might've had a homoerotic relationship, as Alan does not want his wife to hear this. As Oscar Wilde himself couldn't portray this relationship in an explicit manner due to the society he lived in, his aforementioned allusions pave the way for justifying the relationship between Alan Campbell and Dorian Gray. This implication also acts as a demonstration of the moral standards of Victorian society.

With homosexuality being a taboo in that society, these homoerotic imageries act as a Gothic element that contributes to the characterization of the characters within this conjuncture.

Obsession with Youth and Beauty

The obsession with youth and beauty can be considered something that Wilde criticizes in this narrative. The abstract idea of admiring beauty and youth cannot be regarded as a Gothic element alone. However, it adds a Gothic aspect to the narrative when it becomes an obsession. This obsession makes the characters ignore the personality traits of the people they interact with and choose to focus on the beauty of people instead.

This obsession initiates the descent of Dorian, thus poorly influencing those around him. Basil's murder, the alteration in the portrait, and the other Gothic aspects mentioned in the book eventually link to Dorian's obsession with his own beauty and youth. However, this Gothic element is not specific to Dorian's depiction but can be found in almost every prominent character's characterization. For Basil, this obsession shapes his understanding of art and crafting portraits, while for Henry, the abstract idea of beauty is one of the prominent components of his hedonistic ideals. His following mantra also contributes to Dorian's corruption: "there is absolutely nothing in the world but youth" (Wilde, 2013: 25). With praising youth and beauty in different shapes and forms, he adds fuel to Dorian's rapid change and leads to his downfall. Therefore, since this Gothic element mirrors the change of Dorian from an innocent boy to a corrupted character, it reveals the ever-changing dynamic embedded in him.

GOTHIC NATURE OF THE PROMINENT CHARACTERS

The Gothic setting and elements in the book greatly influence how the characters are portrayed in *Dorian Gray*. This section will harmonize the usage of setting and elements and analyze how they affect the portrayal of the characters.

Dorian Gray

More often than not, Gothic novels have a villain at the center of the narrative (Hume, 1969: 269). Therefore, defining Dorian's role in the narrative is vital to comment on this book's Gothic properties. However, one cannot call him a villain at the beginning of the book due to his innocent characterization.

Dorian's innocent outlook manifests in the first few chapters of the narrative. Then, he truly learns about his beauty for the first time with Lord Henry's remarks. Those remarks prompt him to form a new idea in his head and obsesses over his beauty and youth. After he trades his soul for eternal youth and beauty, his innocent characterization begins to change (Manganiello, 1983: 29). It is after Dorian leaves Sibyl Vane as she loses her ability to act that he witnesses the first change in the portrait: "The expression looked different. One would have said that there was a touch of cruelty in the mouth" (Wilde, 2013: 87). With this 'touch of cruelty,' Dorian grows into the Gothic villain.

Nevertheless, Dorian shows empathy and feels remorse and guilt after Sibyl Vane kills herself. This behavior does not portray a typical 'villain' character. Yet, Lord Henry's remarks offer him a way to escape this guilt; thus, Dorian notices a way to ignore the alteration in the portrait: "Why should he watch the hideous corruption of his soul? He kept his youth- that was enough" (Wilde, 2013: 118).

Dorian displays what matters to him and neglects the change in the picture. This is when the adaptive quality derived from his changing dynamic pushes him to embody a double-sided life: a gentleman and a corrupted individual. Dorian visits the East end of London while indulging in acts perceived immoral by society, such as being involved in premarital relationships. However, as Dorian lives his life by Lord Henry's ideals and accepts his worldview thoroughly, people start to point out rumors about his indulgences in immoral activities: "From time-to-time strange rumours about his mode of life crept through London and became the chatter of the clubs" (Wilde, 2013: 124). This is when his adaptive quality diminishes as he loses the balance between his two lives, and corruption gets the best of him while he intensifies his immoral activities.

After encountering James Vane at the East end of London, Dorian starts to live his life in endless horror and terror. This horror and terror forfeit his ability to indulge in those mentioned immoral acts, and he tries to be a good person due to fear. However, since Dorian lacks a heart capable of being genuinely good, there is an implication in the text that he can be the Gothic villain of the story who does not bear any good. The allusion to *Hamlet* by Lord Henry at the end of the novel illustrates that Dorian reduces to his beauty on the outside, and he becomes "a face without a heart" (Wilde, 2013: 204). This shows the difference between appearance and reality, one of the central themes of the narrative.

Lord Henry Wotton

Lord Henry Wotton is a character Wilde develops to mirror the absurdity of Victorian Society's morality frames (Kiryaman, 2019: 75). This aspect of him demonstrates a Gothic characterization that sparkles through his utterances. At first glance, he seems to be influencing merely Dorian. However, when his portrayal is analyzed in parallel with the Gothic properties of the book, it is seen that he possesses a moral frame that is clearly against the ethical codes of the society he lives in. He does not hesitate to state the ideas that would seem improper for a 'gentleman' in his status. However, Basil's remarks early in the novel demonstrate the dichotomy that Henry's actions and his ideals create: "(...) you are thoroughly ashamed of your virtues... You never say a moral thing, and you never do a wrong thing" (Wilde, 2013: 11).

No matter how hard Henry preaches being against the morality codes, he never does something that would go against them. Instead, he personifies evil in the text, and the way he is perceived by his society supports this suggestion. However, we can see that the double sided structure of London does not influence Henry as much as it does Dorian. He never visits the treacherous East end of London to indulge in forbidden pleasures, such as obtaining opium. Yet he praises them and eventually influences Dorian for the worse with whispers of suggestion (Stern, 2017: 759). The Gothic flow of the narrative reveals the hypocritical characteristics of Henry, as he reflects these immoral ideas to others and corrupts them.

Dorian and Henry's characterizations are closely tied together. Henry sparks the self-obsession and climax in Dorian, resulting in his downfall by reflecting on his obsession with youth and beauty. Dorian Gray turns into the Gothic villain of the narrative due to Lord Henry's influence. However, it is safe to state that even though Henry influences Dorian by reflecting his ideals, he does not believe Dorian would live up to his hedonist philosophies, as Henry himself does not do so.

In the end, when Dorian hints about how he killed Basil, Henry states: "It's not in you, Dorian, to commit a murder" (Wilde, 2013: 203). To Lord Henry, Dorian's prominent feature remains his immense beauty and everlasting youth despite his agenda to purposefully manipulate Dorian. He neglects that Dorian's soul is corrupted under his influence and focuses on Dorian's beauty with complete recklessness, which displays his immoral and evil characterization.

Basil Hallward

Basil Hallward can be considered the most aesthetic character of the narrative due to the vivid description of his talent. In addition, he forms an emotional connection with his productions, predominantly the portrait of Dorian Gray, which adds a supernatural aspect to the narrative: "I really can't exhibit it. I have put too much of myself into it" (Wilde, 2013: 6). To him, the sole purpose of drawing is not exhibiting but conveying oneself. While he personifies the good in the narrative by demonstrating certain elements that make one good, such as the aesthetic outlook, a Gothic factor in his characterization is still present. The homoerotic undertones in his statements and his obsession with youth and beauty reinforce his corrupted nature.

Dorian's presence and beauty influence Basil to a point where it dominates and overtakes Basil's character, as displayed in the homoeroticism section. However, since he utterly adores Dorian, he cannot see the bad in him, revealing Basil's obsessive side regarding youth and beauty.

Basil's obsession with youth and beauty reveals itself in the statements he says about Dorian: "Sin is a thing that writes itself across a man's face. It cannot be concealed" (Wilde, 2013: 143). To his ideals and aesthetic outlook, if one is pretty on the face, one must be pretty on the inside. His indulgence in Dorian and his attraction toward him make him blind to all the evil things Dorian does (Liebman, 1999: 302). Therefore, this negligence reveals how detrimental being obsessive about youth and beauty can be, thus, how corruption is embedded within his characterization. Since Dorian's downfall begins with the remarks of Lord Henry about his beauty, Basil's way of unquestioningly flattering him contributes to and escalates Dorian's decadence.

Even though Basil somehow personifies the good in the narrative and tries to protect Dorian from the detrimental influence of Henry, he contains a corrupted nature, just like the two other characters. Furthermore, the homoerotic undertones in his remarks reveal that he only adores beauty and neglects Dorian's downfall as he remains beautiful on the outside.

CONCLUSION

The Gothic genre emerged with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, and it became a tool for authors to criticize their societies. Oscar Wilde was one such author, who utilized the genre to critique Victorian society with his only novel, *Dorian Gray*. In this Gothic novel, Wilde condemned hedonistic lifestyles, corruption, and hypocritical values prevalent in Victorian society. However, Wilde did not express his critiques in such a plain and explicit manner. His prominent characters personified the evil within Victorian society and Wilde depicted their nature with the help of Gothic elements and settings. Accordingly, Dorian's nature is corrupted and contains an ever-changing dynamic, as he is introduced as an innocent character but dies as a foul one. In contrast, Basil and Henry are portrayed as inherently corrupted characters who do not possess the capacity to adapt and evolve within different social environments. From the beginning, they are depicted as corrupted characters and, in the end, they remain the same.

Corruption can be associated with all three prominent characters: Henry, Basil, and Dorian. In Henry's depiction, corruption manifests through his remarks. He does not hesitate to reflect on the ideals considered immoral to those around him. As illustrated in the body of the essay, the Gothic elements of the book help envision Lord Henry's corrupted characterization. He forms the idea of obsession with youth & beauty and demonstrates specific characteristics of homoeroticism. He also contributes to the setting with his corrupted outlook; he personifies the evil in the conflict between good and evil and reveals the hypocritical setting of the novel.

Like Henry, Basil's nature shows a nefarious characterization, but in a lighter way. Basil continuously praises Dorian and draws his picture, and he becomes the one who starts Dorian's self-indulgent outlook, which eventually causes his downfall. Homoeroticism has a central place within the narrative due to Basil's presence, and it shows the corrupted characterization of Basil.

In Dorian's depiction, decadence and the ever-changing character dynamic are at their utmost. As he gets corrupted through the influence of Basil and Henry, he changes from an innocent boy to an immoral man. The Gothic features work as a tool Wilde uses to demonstrate this decadence's varied effects. While he indulges in homoerotic relationships, obsesses over his youth & beauty, and radiates horror and terror throughout the novel, he begins to differ from this initial characterization and gets corrupted. However, his dichotomy between appearance and reality distinguishes his experience from other characters. He uses this dichotomy to get away with immoral acts. As his downfall progresses, the

adaptive quality derived from his ever-changing dynamic presents him as a gentleman in the eyes of society, but he cannot bear this tension, which ultimately destroys him.

Therefore, to answer the research question, it is possible to assert that the Gothic elements and settings help Wilde vividly portray human beings' tendencies to embrace a corrupted nature and the ever-changing character dynamic.

Authorship Contribution

This research was conducted by a single author.

Ethics Committee Statement

An ethics committee statement was not required for this research.

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