



FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA
TRABALLO DE FIN DE GRAO

**A Glance at a Twisted Mind: A Psychoanalytic
Approach to Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray***

Nuria Pérez López
Titor: Jorge Sacido Romero
Grao en Lingua e Literatura Inglesas

CURSO ACADÉMICO: 2019/ 2020



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Título: *A Glance at a Twisted Mind: A Psychoanalytic Approach to Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Resumo: *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Wilde, 1890) is a novel that has aroused the interest of many scholars because of its darkness and the complexity of the character in the title. Dorian Gray is presented as a handsome young man who is easily corrupted by his friend Lord Henry into a life of pleasure which stands in contrast with the Victorian morality of the time and which Wilde himself pursued, connected in his case to the Aesthetic Movement of which he was a part. This character is particularly interesting to analyse because of his peculiar philosophy of life and his notorious behaviour. His later attempt at redemption at the end of Wilde's novel is also remarkable.

The aim of this dissertation is to analyse from a psychoanalytic perspective the psyche of the main character and how it stands in conflict with the Victorian morality of late-19th-century London. For this, I will have recourse to central concepts of psychoanalytical theory such as paranoia, neurosis, and narcissism that in Dorian may be said to achieve pathological proportions and that, in a way, explain his tragic ending. Freudian notions of the double and the triad Ego-Id-Superego will further serve to offer a wider picture of Dorian Gray, particularly in relation to the influence that Lord Henry and Basil exert over him. Major works by the father of psychoanalysis such as *The Ego and the Id* (1923) or *On Narcissism* (Freud, 1914) will be explicitly referred to and commented upon.

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Introduction

The Portrait of Dorian Gray (1891) written by one of the most controversial authors in the 19th century, Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), conceived a character that would soon be remembered in literary history as an emblem of narcissism and aestheticism, with hedonistic tendencies. Wilde's work was very revolutionary for his time since he dealt with topics such as homosexual desire, which was considered illegal and punished by incarceration. The events of this narrative occurred in Late Victorian London and they involve a narcissistic young man who sells his soul in order to remain beautiful and live forever, and who completely surrenders himself to the pleasures of aestheticism, an intellectual and artistic movement which appealed to not only Dorian Gray, but also the author himself, Oscar Wilde. The Aesthetic Movement developed dramatically towards the end of the 19th and its philosophy consisted mainly in finding happiness in the fine arts and in beauty in a broader sense. This movement is coetaneous with psychoanalysis, whose father was Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). Psychoanalysis tried to shed some light over the mysteries of the human psyche presenting it, at first, as divided into two parts: consciousness and the unconscious, particularly focusing on the latter. As this two movements coexisted in time and one can clearly find traces of Freud's ideas in Wilde's novel, I found it interesting to analyse Wilde's main character from a Freudian perspective and bring this two movements together.

The aim of this dissertation is to analyse the main character from a psychoanalytic perspective considering the moral standards of 19th century London. For this purpose, Freud's work will be used to explore the twisted mind of Dorian Gray in order to understand the motive for his actions and get to know his personality. This thesis will be divided into three chapters which will deal with different Freudian concepts and one

chapter that will introduce us to the Victorian period and the two movements which are crucial to understand this analysis, Aestheticism and Psychoanalysis.

The first chapter will introduce those movements to the reader, and it will allocate them in their historical context, which is the Victorian period, more specifically the Late Victorian Period (1880-1914). The second chapter will present an approach to Dorian Gray's divided mind and how the interaction between Ego, Id and Superego operates in his psyche. In this chapter the concept of Oedipus Complex and its importance will be presented and Freud's books *The Ego and The Id* (1923) and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) will be used as the major theoretical support. The third chapter will tackle homosexual desire and it will establish a connection between Dorian's attraction to men and the Freudian concepts of Identification and Oedipus Complex as deal, principally in Freud's book *The Ego and The Id* (1923). Finally, the fourth chapter will focus on narcissism and the concept of the double, while comparing Dorian Gray to another famous literary character, the very origin of the term "narcissism": namely, Narcissus. In this chapter, Freud's *On Narcissism: An Introduction* (1914) and *The Uncanny* (1919) along with the story of Narcissus from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8 AD) will be the most relevant sources for the analysis of Wilde's work.

 Chapter 1

Two Movements of an Era

The Picture of Dorian Gray (Wilde, 1891) by Oscar Wilde (1854- 1900) was written in the Victorian period, more specifically in the Late Victorian period (1880- 1914). The Victorian period was divided into High Victorian (1840-1880) and Late Victorian (1880-1914). This period in British history begins after the Regency Era and corresponds to reign of Queen Victoria of United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (1837-1901) and empress of India (1876-1901), one of the most powerful women in history. She reigned during a period of prosperity characterized by economical wealth and scientific advances, such as the Second Industrial Revolution. After her death, in the Late Victorian period, her son Albert Edward (1841-1910) ascended to the throne as King Edward VII (1901-1910). He was a very beloved monarch whose “reign did much to restore lustre to a monarchy that had shone somewhat dimly during Victoria’s long seclusion as a widow” (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica)

Oscar Fingal O’Flahertie Wills Wilde (1854- 1900), known as Oscar Wilde, was born in 1854 in Dublin, Ireland. This remarkable author was a spokesman for the Aesthetic movement, which supported the creation of art for art’s sake. Wilde was well known at the time because of his flamboyant personality and his wit. His duality amazed and confused critics all over the world, he was:

The Anglo-Irishman with Nationalist sympathies; the Protestant with lifelong Catholic leanings; the married homosexual; the musician of words and painter of

language who confessed to André Gide that writing bored him; the artist astride not two but three cultures, an Anglo-Francophile and a Celt at heart. (Raby, 3)

He was a very controversial man, not only for his writings, such as the book we are dealing with and its alleged immorality, but also for his sexual orientation. Despite the many social and political progressive movements of the Late Victorian period that questioned power, such as the women's suffrage movement or the Irish question, this period was still quite conservative in many aspects of social and political life. The story of Dorian Gray was severely criticized because of the title-character's depraved actions and its author's alleged immorality despite its tragic ending. Wilde met his tragic ending as well when he was condemned to prison on May 25th, 1895, for crimes involving his homosexual orientation, which was considered sinful and illegal at the time. According to the *Criminal Law Amendment Act* (1885), he committed "acts of gross indecency" (Burnie), "a category of misdemeanor which included all forms of sexual intimacy between men" (Foldy, 31). After being released in 1897, the author moved to France and died in Paris in 1900 (Beckson).

As an opposed reaction to the Victorian ethos, the Aesthetic movement aroused a revolutionary line of thought which "advocated whatever behavior was likely to maximize the beauty and happiness in one's life, in the tradition of hedonism" (Duggan, 61). Contrary to the pervading sexual restraint, the religious ideas, and the strict moral code, this movement encouraged to experience life and beauty to the full. As Walter Horatio Pater (1839-1894) wrote in his conclusion of *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873): "with this sense of the splendour of our experience and of its awful brevity, gathering all we are into one desperate effort to see and touch, we shall hardly have time to make theories about the things we see and touch" (211). Ironically, during

the development of Dorian's tragic story we can observe how pursuing this philosophy recklessly ends up transforming Dorian into an evil hideous monster and leading to his own death. This might be Wilde's critique of this lifestyle and the dangers of letting oneself get carried away by the search for pleasure and so falling into immoral narcissistic behaviour. (Duggan, 62). The duality of the Late Victorian period, which was torn between a conservative ethos and progressive social and political movements, is also found in Wilde, who claimed in his preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* that "there is no such thing as a moral or immoral book" (Wilde, Preface), and concludes that "all art is quite useless" (Wilde, Preface), which means that art has no further pretensions than that of being art. However, as was mentioned above, Dorian seems to personify the dangers of this lifestyle, his painting being a reflection of all the evil actions he has conducted in the name of shallow beauty and all the damage he has inflicted upon himself and others. The feeling he has after being proved to be unredeemable along with the feeling of seeing that dreadful monster reflected in the painting, Dorian's true self, drives him mad at the end of the novel leading him to accidentally take his life in a moment of rage. So, in the end, we do encounter a work of art that sends a moral message about the dangers of radical Aestheticism for characters and readers. Wilde is indeed using art as a tool to educate people about the dangers of moving from Aestheticism, a philosophy that Wilde himself followed, to Hedonism. The first movement seeks for happiness in beauty while the other looks for fulfillment in pleasure, due to the close relation between beauty and pleasure, it is easy to drift from the first philosophy to the latter.

Shocking ideas contemporary to those of the Aesthetic Movement were those coming from the Austrian Empire and first expressed in the writing and practices of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), the founder of psychoanalysis. He was a physiologist and medical doctor, who in his early beginnings worked with Joseph Breuer and elaborated a

theory of the mind, developed, among others, in books such as *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and later completed in other works such as *The Ego and the Id* (1923). He presented the mind as divided into consciousness and the unconscious. The first represented the surface of the mental apparatus and the thoughts one is aware of, and the latter represented the thoughts that are repressed because “a force opposes them” (Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 5) and cannot become conscious. He also presented the state of pre-consciousness, which consisted of non-repressed thoughts that are on a state previous to that of consciousness. They become activated once a person senses something from the outside world that awakens them such as a smell, a sound etc.

He then fully elaborated this theory in *The Ego and The Id* (1923) presenting the mind as a complex system of energies. According to Freud, the mind was divided into three important areas that we know as the Ego, the Id, and the Superego, each one of them executing different functions that shape our personality. Freud was a revolutionary figure who tried to decipher the mysteries of the mind and mental illnesses with a new method: psychoanalysis.

Central in Freud’s exploration of the mind is his concern for the unconscious part of the mental apparatus, of that which is repressed, which we will explain at greater length in the following chapters. Freud showed interest in many different areas, such as, sexuality, including infant sexuality, repression, narcissism, paranoia, neurosis, etc. Despite the novelty and uniqueness of his perspective on the human mind, Freud’s thought was influenced by other intellectuals of his time. The most obvious influences were Charcot and Breuer, who had a direct impact on him, but also Charles Darwin (1809-1882) and his theory of evolution. His theories and achievements, despite being greatly criticized, have been proven useful in a variety of fields related to psychology, anthropology, semiotics, and art. (Thornton)

Some discussion of the historical context of their emergence is necessary to understand the tenets of both Aestheticism and psychoanalysis, which, in turn, adds to the understanding of the work chosen for discussion in this dissertation. I will begin by establishing a connection between the Victorian morality and the Aesthetic way of life. Later, I will move onto an exploration of the emergence of Freud's psychoanalysis, in particular of the scientific discoveries of this era that influenced his thought.

The Victorian era is the cradle of Wilde's Aestheticism, and, as we have mentioned above, it is the period that comprehends the years between 1820 and 1914, roughly coinciding with Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901). The High Victorian period was an era of great material splendour due to the progress of industrialization linked to Britain's large empire and stable government. Britain still preserved its colonies around the world and "the City of London was at the centre of international markets of capital, money, and commodities" (Joyce and Kellner). The Industrial Revolution was progressing and opening the path to a Second Industrial Revolution in mid-19th century, when the economic systems got increasingly more complex as liberalism became dominant. The development of mass production made more commodities available to those with lower purchasing power, yet the vast majority of the population worked in factories for long periods of time and low wages. Low incomes forced women and children to work in order to contribute to the household (Aubin et al.). Wilde viewed industrialization as an evil process that was turning men into living machines, taking away from mankind what makes us really human: namely art. He considered cowards the ones who did not dare to go beyond the limits of mere production of goods and those who lived life according to the standards of a repressive society. Thus, for him, the ideals represented by the philosophy of Aestheticism would be a positive influence on the people. Aestheticism was an escape away from the mechanized production that was

dehumanizing workers and destroying their spirits. Wilde proposed this philosophy in order to encourage men to work not only with their hands, but also with their heart and mind, and thus, introducing beauty in a very obscure time for creativity. (Duggan, 62)

In terms of morality, this is a period marked by prudery alongside hypocrisy. Double standards were the norm. On the one hand, sex was exclusively discussed by educated men who occupied a high position in society, while women found pride in their ignorance about anything sex-related, including their own bodies. On the other hand, prostitution, female sexual desire and venereal diseases were part of the silenced or hidden underside. (Steinbach) The vices and virtues of 19th-century London could be said to be truthfully reflected in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, where Wilde shows us a more carnal side of a society that disguises itself in false prudery and weak morals. He who denied the preconceived moral duty of art showed that art can be truly moral when it abandons moralism (Aubin et al.). Oscar Wilde wrote this work in a very restrictive time defying much of what Victorianism stood for. However, it was not written for mere provocation, but also as a warning about the dangers of abandoning every inch of morality and pursuing immediate pleasure.

Furthermore, this duality extended to the divided spheres of society: the public and the private. Men belonged to the public sphere, the sphere of work, intellectual production or political action, whereas women were confined to the private sphere, where their duties were taking care of the house and raising children. The leading roles in society were exclusively occupied by men and women were merely decorative. Nonetheless, this was only applied to the upper strata of society because, as we stated before, lower classes could not survive only on the man's wage alone (Steinbach).

The Victorian era was also a period of great scientific advances, the most notable being the publication of *On the Origin of Species* (1859) by the English scientist Charles

Darwin, whose work highly influenced Sigmund Freud. This theory was of great help to place human beings at the core of his studies since they were not seen as a separate entity from the rest of animals that inhabit the earth, therefore, making it possible for them to be the object of study. In the field of physics, immense advances were made with the formulation of the principle that claims that energy cannot be destroyed: it can only change its place, so that any amount of energy of any system is always constant. This is known as the principle of the conservation of energy, formulated by Helmholtz, which had a great impact on Freud's theory of the mind that is presented as a complex system of energies. He applied Helmholtz' principle to human beings, developing his theory of personality around this concept, and thus, leading psychoanalysis into the mission of discovering the way psychic energy moved and changed how it affected our bodies and minds. (Thornton)

Furthermore, there was a general fascination for psychology at the time, which, along with the scientific advances happening at the time, encouraged Freud to formulate his psychoanalytic theory and delve into the mysteries of the human psyche.

Chapter 2

The Downfall of an Unbalanced Mind

Oscar Wilde and his controversial ideas in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) were not appropriately analysed by the critics in his era due to the conservative spirit of the Late Victorian Period (1880-1914) that opposed Wilde's progressive ideas, which were much ahead of his time. More than a hundred years later, Wilde's only novel is still approached from a variety of perspectives, from historical and sociological to psychological. This chapter aims to inquire into the development of the character taking a psychoanalytical point of view that will help us understand the dynamics of Dorian Gray's actions and the path that took him to his downfall. For this purpose, Freud's division of the human psyche proposed in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and fully elaborated in *The Ego and the Id* (1923) will help explain the course that led Dorian to his tragic ending. The interaction between Ego, Id and Super-Ego in the central character will be one of the major points of interest of this dissertation. Furthermore, as Basil Howard states in the novel that "it is rather the painter who, on the coloured canvas reveals himself" (Wilde, 6), an identification between character and real author cannot be established, though the idea that there may be something of Wilde himself in his three main characters will be discussed later on in this chapter.

Wilde creates a rapidly declining character who gives in to hedonistic tendencies along with the questionable morality that they entail. Dorian Gray starts the novel as a pure and innocent orphan who has not matured yet, mostly due to the lack of guidance during his childhood. Not long after Dorian was born, his villainous grandfather commanded the murder of Dorian's poor father who eloped with his daughter, hence

causing the death of the grieving widow soon after the tragic event happened. Thus, little Dorian became an orphan raised by his despotic grandfather, and so was deprived of the typical Oedipal dynamics that Freud wrote about in his book *The Ego and the Id*. Mastering this phase of development of one's personality known as the Oedipus Complex means that the child has developed the Superego or Ego-Ideal, which is "the representative of our relation to our parents" (Freud, *The Ego and The Id*, 48) moving onto a later, more mature age of human development.

Before undergoing the Oedipus Complex, Freud claims that children's minds have a dual division between Ego and Id. The Id is the most primitive part of our mind, the one that deals with desire and in which the pleasure principle reigns, a driving force that seeks the immediate gratification of the Id's urges and sexual impulses. It contains the traits of personality that were inherited, and the life instincts related to sex (Eros) and the death instincts related to the desire of returning to an inanimate state (Thanatos). The Id is unconscious, that is to say, it operates disregarding the external world and one is not aware of it. The Id is the only part of the human mind that is fully hidden in the depths of our psyche, even though there are other parts of it that are partially unconscious, such as the Ego and the Superego. Due to being completely unconscious and therefore unaware of how the outside world operates, it remains in an infantile stage.

The Ego "is that part of the id which has been modified by the direct influence of the external world acting through perceptual consciousness" (Freud, "*The Ego and The Id*", 30), hence being the part that balances our Id satisfying some of its desires as if they were its own, while repressing others, in accordance with the social norms. The Ego seeks to replace the Id's pleasure principle by the reality principle "which without giving up the intention of ultimately attaining pleasure yet demands and enforces the postponement of satisfaction, the renunciation of manifold possibilities of it, and the temporary endurance

of 'pain' on the long and circuitous road to pleasure" (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 5). It is the part that represents reason and sanity, in contrast with the Id which contains the passions.

At the beginning of the novel, Dorian is described as a "little more than lad, though he is really over twenty" (Wilde, 11) drawing the attention of the reader to his infantile looks, which it could be linked to the immaturity of the character who has not yet mastered the Oedipus Complex. Thus, Dorian reached the young adult age without having really developed a Superego or Ego-Ideal, which is "the heir of the Oedipus complex and thus it is also the expression of the most powerful vicissitudes experienced by the libido in the id" (Freud, *The Ego and The Id*, 48). Initially, the Superego could be said to be the representative of the Id, of the internal world, in contrast to the Ego which is representative of the external world. However, it must be noted that the Superego is not only a representative of the internal world, but it is also external, as part of the external regulations imposed by society and the reality principle. Any conflict that might arise between the Ego and the ideal would reflect the differences between those worlds, and between what is real and what is mental (in the sense of disengaged from the real). (Freud, *The Ego and The Id*, 48). Dorian did not experience this sort of conflicts in his early life because he did not develop a Superego, thence, he never experienced the sense of guilt or of self-judgement because there was no tension "between the demands of conscience and the actual attainments of the ego" (Freud, *The Ego and The Id*, 49).

According to Freud, after giving up a sexual object, a modification of the Ego takes place, and the first transformation of an erotic object-choice into a modification of the ego happens at the Oedipus Complex stage, when the mother, who is the first object of erotic attachment, must be given up, leaving an important mark in one's personality known as the appearance of a Superego. For this purpose, the little boy should experience

a process of identification with the father: he “will exhibit a special interest in his father; he would like to grow like him and be like him, and take his place everywhere” (Freud, “*Group Psychology*”, 105) and develop an object-cathexis for his mother. After developing that sexual tie to his mother, the infant regards his father as an obstacle and longs to replace him. However, as Dorian did not have a father to follow as a role model and a mother to set as his object-cathexis, he had to find those figures in other people and in a later stage in life.

On the one hand, the figure of the mother is found in a character that tends to be overlooked by many critics, Basil Hallward, who “is depicted not only as a man who secretly desires Dorian but also as his ‘mother,’ the creator of his physical image: the portrait that Basil has painted and labeled his masterpiece” (Mahaffey, 253). Yan Zhang proposes Basil as this failed Oedipal mother who loves Dorian unconditionally and always urges him to behave according to social norms and to be a perfect gentleman (379). Basil is portrayed as a warm and caring character whose description fits perfectly the classical ideal of a mother. Furthermore, he gave life to the new Dorian, to that ideal that will haunt Dorian and that Basil will worship until death does them part. Basil attempts to reform him until his last breath due to his complete devotion claiming that “it is never too late” (Wilde, 176), and quickly adopting a motherly role as it is shown in the following lines: “What is it that one was taught to say in one’s boyhood? Lead us not into temptation. Forgive us our sins. Wash away our iniquities” (Wilde, 175). Despite seeing the monstrosity of Dorian’s soul, he never abandons him. Once Basil is dead and therefore, no longer attempting to redeem him, Dorian seems to have a clear path that leads to his own destruction, being only guided by Lord Henry who urges Dorian to pursue a life full of pleasures and not think of the consequences. This could be considered some type of what psychoanalysis calls “transference” which affirms that “the most

intimate beliefs, even the most intimate emotions such as compassion, crying, sorrow, laughter, can be transferred, delegated to others without losing their sincerity.” (Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 34). Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) used as an example a praying Tibetan monk that writes a prayer in a piece of paper, rolls it, and places it on a Tibetan wheel, so the wheel will pray for himself. In Lord Henry’s case, Dorian allows him in his psychological interiority to do as Žižek claims in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989): “I can think about whatever I want, I can yield to the most dirty and obscene fantasies, and it does not matter because— to use a good Stalinist expression — whatever I am thinking, *objectively* I am praying” (Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 34). The obvious father figure would be the one character who transfers his emotions and thoughts onto Dorian Gray, Lord Henry Wotton, who “influences and molds Dorian according to his own theory about hedonism and aesthetic” (Zhang, 379). Lord Henry shapes Dorian according to a dogma that he cannot himself follow. He shares some radical and scandalous ideas throughout the novel; however, he does not have the courage to live according to them, because, unlike Dorian, he still abides by an acceptable social conduct. Thus, Dorian was increasingly poisoned by Henry’s delightful and dangerous hedonistic ideas, while Lord Henry was comfortably living as an average Late Victorian gentleman. Henry’s attitude towards Dorian is very far apart from Basil’s, a fact that becomes clear in the moment that Dorian attempts to redeem himself and Lord Henry claims that “there is no use your telling me that you are going to be good [...] You are quite perfect. Pray, don’t change” (Wilde, 235). Lord Henry is frightened that he cannot keep materialising his own desires in the perpetually young and handsome Dorian. Therefore, he does not encourage him to be a better person unlike his motherly counterpart, Basil Hallward. In sum, the transference dynamics at work allow Lord Henry to enjoy hedonistic pleasure through Dorian.

Another remarkable figure in the novel is the one that Zhang (380) proposes Sybil Vane's brother, James Vane, as the true father who did leave a mark on Dorian's personality and guided him through the path to maturity. He represents the consequences of Dorian's depraved actions. Right before their first meeting Dorian thought that "one's days were too brief to take the burden of another's errors on one's shoulders" (Wilde 212), but after the second accidental meeting with James, when "the consciousness of being hunted snared, tracked down, had begun to dominate him" (Wilde 224), Dorian rapidly switched his attitude, as stated in the following passage: "I am too much concentrated on myself. My own personality has become a burden to me. I want to escape to go away to forget" (Wilde 230). Dorian appears, thus, to be giving up his narcissism and beginning the path to maturity because being so self-centred is making him sick. James Vane is giving him a sense of self-identity that he had not experienced before as a result of building his own personality conforming to Basil's and Lord Henry's standards, which are in conflict because of their very different personalities. The first encourages Dorian to be a good gentleman and act according to society's expectations, while the latter finds this abhorrent and prefers a life of scandal and pleasure for the young lad. Thus, making Dorian become more and more confused so as to have real trouble in finding his own identity. James Vane inspires in Dorian the desire to be a better person and leave his sins behind, to finally achieve redemption.

These three characters influenced Dorian's decisions in life and they completely shaped his personality. Throughout the novel, Wilde shows how dangerous it is to manipulate an individual with hedonistic ideas when he has not yet developed a Superego that guides him through the process of maturity. The portrait that Basil painted for young Dorian can be considered his Superego, as Wilde mentions in the novel: "The portrait that Basil Hallward had painted of him would be a guide to him through life, would be to him

what holiness is to some, as conscience to others, and the fear of God to us all.” (Wilde, 106). It is the physical representation of his degenerate actions, an external Superego where he could comprehend the seriousness of his misdoings. This ideal represents “what we value as the highest in the human soul” (Freud, *The Ego and The Id*, 48) and it represents the presence of the parents at a more mature age. Nonetheless, Dorian did not become more independent from these parental figures after the formation of the Ego ideal, because he immediately hides the portrait in the attic when he notices the first changes after leading the beautiful Sybil Vane into committing suicide. Dorian only became aware of how cruelly he behaved with Sybil once the portrait changed. Once it caught his attention, he was determined to improve his behaviour and marry Sybil Vane. Here, it is important to highlight the immoral influence that Lord Henry exerted on him, manipulating him into not being accountable for his own actions and eradicating every feeling of guilt that he started to experience. Thereafter, he even sees this rare phenomenon as an opportunity to deviate from what is moral without suffering from any of the consequences. Furthermore, in a final attempt to escape the consequences of his misdoings and destroy the element that has been haunting him since the beginning, Dorian kills himself. This violent act is explained by the tension between these Ego ideal, which is represented by the portrait and the Ego, generating an unconscious sense of guilt where the main character is not aware of this feeling and he just feels sick. According to Freud in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), this sense of guilt originates from “the tension between the harsh super-ego and the ego that is subjected to it, [which] is called by us the sense of guilt; it expresses itself as a need for punishment” (38). This guilt is key to understand Dorian’s downfall, because is directly linked to self- aggressiveness:

His aggressiveness is introjected, internalized; it is, in point of fact, sent back to where it came from — that is, it is directed towards his own ego. There it is taken over by a portion of the ego, which sets itself over against the rest of the ego as super-ego, and which now, in the form of ‘conscience’, is ready to put into action against the ego the same harsh aggressiveness that the ego would have liked to satisfy upon other, extraneous individuals. (Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 38)

Furthermore, as Freud mentions in *The Ego and the Id*, an “exacerbation of this unconscious sense of guilt could turn people into criminals. But it is undoubtedly a fact. In many criminals, especially youthful ones, it is possible to detect a very powerful sense of guilt which existed before the crime, and is not therefore the result of it but its motive” (76). The deed that finally turned Dorian into a criminal was the killing of Basil Hallward, and based on Freud’s thoughts, he might have been pushed to murder his friend because Basil overwhelmed him with the reminder of all his past evil doings, “why is your friendship so fatal to young men?” (Wilde, 167). This question, followed by a list of all the young souls that he had corrupted, made Dorian change his attitude towards Basil and began to see in him a threat to his own world. The aggressive behaviour that he exhibits is due to his being ruled by the Id, the most primitive part of the mind, and to his sense of guilt, which encourages him to commit the crime.

In fact, each one of the three main characters of the novel embody a different part of the human psyche according to Wilde’s coetaneous author Freud and his division of the mind (Zhongzhe, 17). These characters can also be interpreted as an epitome of Oscar Wilde’s own personality. As Wilde himself stated: “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” (Raby, 79). Through the analysis of these three characters, the mysteries of the psyche of one of the most important writers of the 19th century will be unravelled.

In light of this theory of the mind, Dorian represents the Id. He begins the novel as a white canvas, his personality has not been formed and he lacks a Superego to inspire him to be a better version of himself. He is a reckless young man who is misguided by Lord Henry to fall into a hedonistic behaviour. It is after meeting Lord Henry that his downfall commences. Being poisoned by his ideas, Dorian embarks on a journey of pleasure and sins ignoring every possible consequence that his actions may have on other people or on himself. As the Id, he is completely dominated by the pleasure principle; he seeks immediate gratification and he is guided by his most primitive instincts. It is also worth considering Dorian sadistic tendencies that are representative of the death instincts, which are part of the Id and they are exteriorised in aggressive acts, such as the killing of Basil Hallward or the destruction of his portrait leading to his own death. The destruction of the portrait that ends Dorian’s life fulfils the aim of the death instincts that aspire to return to their original inanimate state, as opposed to the sexual instincts, that seek self-preservation, “death is the ‘real result’ of life and therefore so far its aim, while the sexual instinct is the incarnation of the will to live” (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 63). However, they are not always translated into aggressiveness, they can also be “rendered harmless by being fused with erotic components” (Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 79), which matches perfectly with Dorian’s perpetual quest to satisfy himself with carnal delights. It is this hedonistic conduct that makes him a perfect embodiment of the Id.

The Id is, as I have been arguing all along, not the only part of the psyche that it is to be found embodied in the novel. The Ego is also voiced by one of the protagonists, Lord Henry. He attempts to fool us with his cynical speech about life and morality

throughout the book, though he did never live according to the ideas he gives expression to. He is a great epitome for the Ego because he is not as preoccupied about morality as Basil Hallward, and he is not acting according to his primitive urges as Dorian. Nevertheless, his thoughts can also be identified with the Id as he is a corrupting force for Dorian, even though he does not apply his dogma to himself and he reproduces the social norms, he uses Dorian to fulfil his phantasies. As the Ego, he acts according to the social rules, and despite his scandalous ideas, he is an average Victorian gentleman whose believes might have an impact on those who know him, but his acts have never been of such immorality as those of his protegee. As has been mentioned above, he uses Dorian to materialise his desires without being affected by the consequences using a mechanism that is known to psychoanalysis as “transference”. His delightful theories increasingly separate Dorian, the embodiment of the Id, and Basil, the voice of the Superego. As opposed to Dorian’s Id which follows the pleasure principle, Lord Henry’s Ego follows the reality principle, and as the Ego “tries to mediate between the world and the id, to make the Id comply with the world’s demands and, by means of muscular activity, to accommodate the world to the Id’s desires” (Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 83), hence, he does not get involve in scandals, unlike Dorian Gray, while satisfying some of his own desires and giving up those which are completely unacceptable by society. Nonetheless, Lord Henry could also be considered a Superego, according to Lacanian theory whose Superego demands enjoyment and who is “the anti-ethical agency, the stigmatization of our ethical betrayal” (Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*). Lord Henry abides by the norm while enjoying forbidden pleasures, as it were, by proxy.

Lastly, the character that personifies the Superego is Basil Hallward, who is a clear symbol of morality in the novel and an epitome of parental and social standards. As the Superego, Basil represents the values that a person esteems the highest, he is an honest

and kind person with a strong ethos who untiringly protects the main character. He is proved to have the most solid moral compass among the different characters. Those noble virtues that Basil possesses often contrast with Dorian's actions, specially his compassion, which highlights Dorian's lack of empathy, particularly in the moment of Basil's murder which represents the Id erasing the Superego and gaining more control of the psyche. Thus, the difference between these two entities is clear in the novel and the struggle of the triad of the mind is obvious. This is also proven by the Superego, Basil, being always in conflict with the Ego, Lord Henry, and constantly trying to stop him from influencing young Dorian with his decadent ideas —an example would be when Basil reminds Henry of the dangers of the narcissism he preaches, “but, surely, if one lives merely for one's self, Harry, one pays a terrible price for doing so?” (Wilde, 86). Basil's moral superiority is explicit throughout the novel, however, despite Lord Henry being so immoral, they remain friends. Zhongzhe proposes that this relationship between Henry and Basil can be an epitome of the relationship between the Ego and the Superego (18), who are obliged to work together, but have a constant tension between them.

To summarize, Dorian is the perfect example of how an unbalanced mind which is increasingly alienated from reality and poisoned with hedonistic values is unavoidably destined to a tragic ending. As a young boy he could not master the Oedipus Complex, hence lacking that guidance that the Superego provides and being forced to find parental figures that could guide him. Despite finding those figures later in life, all of them failed to lead him to a moral and happy life. Lord Henry's intoxicating cynicism was key to Dorian's downfall and it exposes how the constant rejection of taking accountability for his actions by hiding away his Superego leads to tragedy. After analysing the different characters of the novel, a sense of Wilde's personality and his dissatisfaction with the morality of Late Victorian England is noted. His revolutionary ideas were not appropriate

for the time, but new analysis reveals him as a very complex mind that struggled with morality as his characters did. Each one of these characters unveils some of the features that Wilde admires: Dorian's beauty and recklessness, Basil's strong ethos and Lord Henry's cynic charm; and each of them represent the different parts of Wilde's mind and symbolise his moral dilemmas.

 Chapter 3

The Portrait of Homoerotic Desire: Dorian Gray, the Oedipus Complex and Identification

Homosexuality is one of the topics that cannot be ignored in Oscar Wilde's novel. His sexual orientation caused him plenty of troubles throughout his whole life, since homosexual acts in England were considered a crime until the 1960's, and led him to his incarceration in May 25th, 1895, charged with committing "acts of gross indecency" (Burnie). Ever since the trials, the question of homosexuality has been discussed until this day because it was regarded as a moral and mental problem that defied the established heteronormativity, just as Wilde's coetaneous author, Freud, thought at the time: "although he repeatedly defended the liberation of homosexuals, Freud nevertheless kept it [homosexuality] on the level of psychopathology" (Goebel, 185). Freud's theories of homosexuality, which would be nowadays consider homophobic, can be found in *The Ego and The Id* (originally published in 1923), at the point in which he deals with the relationship between "Identification" and the Oedipus Complex. In this chapter, Dorian's non-fulfilment of this complex and the particular manner he experienced the identification process will be tackled according to Freudian standards, giving us a sense of the author's views on the topic, which, Eckart Goebel argued in the passage quoted above reproduced the prejudices towards same-sex orientations. Nonetheless, in this chapter we are adopting a classic Freudian reading of homosexuality since he did treat it as a pathology. The development of homosexual desire and the evolution of queer characters will also be analysed for a better understanding of Dorian Gray's personality and his role in the novel.

In the previous chapter, the matter of the Oedipus Complex was discussed, concluding that Dorian Gray was not able to master this complex, because he did not identify with his father as a child and did not develop an object-cathexis for his mother, and thus, failed to develop a Superego, which eventually led him to a tragic ending because of this unsolved conflict. Furthermore, the simplest form of the Oedipus Complex was explained, which is the one that assumes the boy's heterosexuality, which was established by Freud as the "norm", the root word of the adjective "normal" and "normative". However, Dorian does not fit into that socially prescriptive category: even more, his case is more complicated as he experiences both homosexual as well as heterosexual desire. If any, he could be placed more appropriately into the bisexual category.

Homosexual orientation or tendency is present from the very beginning of the novel and does not affect Dorian only. Basil, the painter, struggles to hide his love for Dorian Gray, which has been expressed in his work of art. He claims that "the reason I [Basil] will not exhibit this picture is that I am afraid that I have shown in it the secret of my own soul" (Wilde, 6), most likely the secret that he is too afraid to reveal is one that might lead him to prison and ruin his reputation. Basil's decision to silence his own feelings is a literary example of the repression suffered by those who experienced homosexual desire in the Late Victorian period. Dorian, on his part, is not so subtle regarding his lust towards men, as is made fairly explicit in this conversation with Lord Henry Wotton:

'Always! That is a dreadful word. It makes me shudder when I hear it. Women are so fond of using it. They spoil every romance by trying to make it last for ever. It is a meaningless word too. The only difference between a caprice and

a life-long passion is that the caprice lasts a little longer'. As they entered the studio, Gray put his hand upon Lord Henry's arm. 'In that case, let our friendship be a caprice.' (Wilde, 25-26)

The sexual undertones detected in this dialogue are unequivocal. When Dorian says he wishes his friendship with Lord Henry to be a caprice after Henry's previous affirmations, he is letting the reader know about Dorian's desire for men. However, Wilde might have tried to deceive the critics of his time by deciding to call their relationship a "friendship", hence leaving some ambiguity in order to keep the subtleness and avoid conflict for dealing with such taboo topics; even though in any contemporary analysis, homosexuality or homoeroticism is one of the main and most conspicuous topics of this novel and it is impossible to ignore it.

Nonetheless, it is undeniable that Dorian was infatuated with Sybil Vane and with the lady that he met in the countryside whom he decided to abandon for her own good. This lady was "quite beautiful like Sybil Vane [...] She was simply a girl in a village. But I really loved her. I am quite sure that I loved her" (Wilde, 236). Hence, Dorian's bisexual orientation can be plausible or, even, undeniable. However, it is not unreasonable to consider the strong heteronormative standards enforced in the Late Victorian period might have influenced Dorian's own sexual orientation, leading him to automatically fixate on women as his object cathexis, because it was the acceptable option, and forcing him to repress his feelings towards men, at least until he learned about aestheticism and was freed of social conventions by Lord Henry's hedonistic ideas at the beginning of the novel.

In light of Freudian theory it may be argued that Dorian's experience of homosexual desire is due to the abnormal realisation of the Oedipus Complex during

childhood. Freud describes the type of Oedipus Complex, as explained in the previous chapter of this dissertation, as a simplification, and claims that the complete complex is “twofold, positive and negative, and is due to the bisexuality originally present in children” (Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 42). Considering the heteronormativity ruling the Late Victorian period, this statement is a very radical take on sexuality since it was unthinkable to consider that children are originally bisexual or, even, that they have sexual desires at all. Nonetheless, he introduces bisexuality in children as a complicating element that “makes it so difficult to obtain a clear view of the facts in connection with the earliest object-choices and identifications” (Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 43). As Mary Lynne Ellis and Noreen O’Connor claim “his assumption of an original bisexuality implies a bisexuality which is already biologically given. However, the child’s libido is then shaped through its social relations with its parents” (Chapter 5)

As it has been mentioned, Dorian Gray did not have the opportunity to master the Oedipus Complex and develop his sexuality through his attitude towards his parents since his mother was “snatched away by death, the boy left to solitude and the tyranny of an old and loveless man” (Wilde, 39). He became an orphan at a very young age and was raised by his abusive grandfather, who continuously punished him by locking him up in the attic, where his conscience, the portrait, will later be stored to be kept at a distance from him, as his grandfather used to do with young Dorian. Although, in the previous chapter I have argued how Dorian tried to find substitute parental figures later in his life such as Lord Henry (as the failed father), Basil Hallward (as the Oedipal mother) and James Vane (as the true father who inspired him to become a better person), he, nonetheless, failed in his attempt to solve his Oedipal conflicts. Therefore, it is a possibility that he might have retained the original bisexual attachment of his childhood. Thus, “homosexuality in this scheme is always construed as regressive: Freud invariably

speaks of it as an atavism, in which the child gets stuck —fixated— at some more primitive stage of psychic evolution” (Robinson, 92). Hence, he refers to homosexuality as an anomaly in children’s and adults’ development.

Nonetheless, Sigmund Freud seems to have some contradictory ideas regarding homosexuality, which makes him a more interesting case study:

In Freud’s psychic universe, homosexuality is everywhere, insinuating itself into the psychic lives of the most impeccably “normal” and presentable individuals. Indeed, no one has done more to destabilize the notion of heterosexuality than Freud. In Freud’s universe there simply are no heterosexuals, at least not psychologically. Similarly, he insists that manifest heterosexuality, far from being a fact of nature, is a precarious psychic achievement, and one that needs to be accounted for. (Robinson, 93)

He did assume an original bisexuality in children, but he also treated homosexuality as a psychopathology. However, it is important to note that despite the efforts of other psychologists in defining homosexuality as a sickness, Freud even considered homosexuality as an antithesis to neurosis. As Paul Robinson explains in his essay *Homosexuality and Psychoanalysis* (2001), Freud conceived neuroses as “the ‘negative’ of the perversions, by which he meant that homosexual urges become pathogenic only when repressed. The person who acted on his homosexual impulses was in theory immune to neurosis, whereas those impulses became dangerous precisely when they were driven into the unconscious” (92-93). Since homosexuality is opposite to neurosis, and neurosis “the ‘negative’ of the perversions” (Robinson, 92), Freud indicated that homosexuality is indeed a perversion, even though when homosexuality is acted upon

it prevents neurosis. These contradictory ideas regarding homosexuality are also visible in the manner homosexual lust is tackled. Oscar Wilde did not represent homosexuality as a sickness, however, he did create a mentally unstable character, who is the epitome of narcissism, manifest homosexual passions which could be perceived as a way of punishing queer characters in order to display homosexual behaviour as immoral, so it would be appropriate to the moral standards of the 19th century or, perhaps, as a reflection of Wilde's own Christian guilt for feeling homosexual desire. Since the 19th century society is very homophobic and Oscar Wilde was raised in a Christian environment, Wilde might have internalised homophobia and reflected this guilt in his novel by punishing the characters that experience the same homosexual desire that he experiences. As Joseph Carroll expresses in his study about Christian guilt and homosexuality: "In Wilde, the moral sense couches itself explicitly and imaginatively in Christian terms—in terms of self-sacrificing love, sin, remorse, redemption, and the soul" (291). Sensual pleasure would go against the Christian moral pathos since it "associates itself with egoism, worldly vanity, and cruelty" (Carroll, 291), unlike the moral pathos which is linked to "devoted love, but it manifests itself primarily as pity for the poor and as tenderness toward children" (Carroll, 291). Thus, it is understood that everything that Dorian Gray represents (greed, narcissism and homosexual lust) goes against Wilde's Christian upbringing and are considered morally wrong. For this reason, along with the need to avoid conflict with the Late Victorian London authorities, it might have caused Wilde to punish these homosexual feelings in the novel.

Returning to the main character's abnormal realisation of the Oedipus Complex, another important feature of this complex is Identification, which was defined by Freud "as the earliest expression of an emotional tie with another person. It plays a part in the early history of the Oedipus Complex. A little boy will exhibit a special interest in his

father; he would like to grow like him and be like him, and take his place everywhere” (Freud, *Group Psychology*, 19). Freud affirms that this process of identification “behaves like a derivative of the first, oral phase of the organization of the libido, in which the object that we long for and prize is assimilated by eating” (Freud, *Group Psychology*, 19), therefore, Freud establishes a relation to the culture of cannibalism, by eating the object the Ego desires, the eater would acquire the characteristics of that object. However, in homosexual children this process is slightly different because the Oedipus Complex is inverted. In this scenario, the little boy would adopt a feminine attitude towards his father and he would set him as an object of desire, while in the heterosexual version of identification, the boy would identify with the father assuming his characteristics. Dorian Gray did not have the opportunity to identify with, nor set his father as a loved object in the early years of his life. Notwithstanding, he did find a father figure, as it has been explained in the previous chapter, embodied by Lord Henry Wotton who moulds Dorian’s personality according to his aesthetic and hedonistic ideals. Dorian sets Lord Henry as an object but also identifies with him. According to Freud, it is possible that this phenomenon occurs and the “object-choice is turned back into identification—the ego assumes the characteristics of the object” (Freud, *Group Psychology*, 20). Nonetheless, this type of identification is “a partial and extremely limited one and only borrows a single trait from the person who is its object” (Freud, *Group Psychology*, 20). For this reason, Dorian shares a crucial element with Lord Henry, that is his philosophy, his aestheticism blended with hedonism, which are key topics in Wilde’s novel. Throughout the book, Dorian blindly follows Henry’s intoxicating ideas which can be considered the shared personality trait derived from the identification process. Nonetheless, Henry’s are mere ideals as he does not act on them, while Dorian is the epitome of Henry’s desire in the sense that he does not only admire his beauty, but also finds in him a way to experience

by proxy an ideal life, luring young Dorian into a hedonistic life according to his own ethos, without his reputation being affected in any way, without having to pay a price.

This hedonistic life that Dorian lives is full of homoerotic encounters with men, who are led to a tragic ending due to Dorian's recklessness. This inevitable tragic fate that characters who experiment homosexual desire suffer is another remarkable topic that is worth analysing. The protagonist is one of the characters who meets that unfortunate ending, nevertheless, as it has been said before, it is also one of the characters, along with Lord Henry who is the original corrupting force for Dorian, who leads every other character who falls in love with him to eternal damnation. Dorian himself is completely ruled by the pleasure principle and he seeks immediate gratification without being able to delay that satisfaction, even when the means to obtain that satisfaction are not moral or available, so he completely ignores the consequences that his actions might have, which leads his lovers and himself to a fatal end. Dorian and the characters that experiment this kind of lust are severely punished in the novel. This is particularly obvious when Basil lists Dorian's lovers and his dreadful fate:

'Why is your friendship so fatal to young men? There was that wretched boy in the Guards who committed suicide. You were his great friend. There was Sir Henry Ashton, who had to leave England, with a tarnished name. You and he were inseparable. What about Adrian Singleton, and his dreadful end? What about Lord Kent's only son, and his career? [...] What about the young Duke of Perth? What sort of life has he got now? What gentleman would associate with him?' (Wilde, 167)

As has been mentioned above, it is the ethos of the Late Victorian period which might have forced Oscar Wilde to write tragic endings for his queer characters, perhaps under the false pretext of a moral lesson because of his Christian guilt and in order to avoid any trouble related to his own sexual orientation. As a way to avoid this probable backlash, he still leaves some ambiguity in the book, particularly concerning Lord Henry and Dorian's relationship. Lord Henry is one of the few characters who does not meet a dreadful end; one of the reasons might be the one mentioned above: Lord Henry is not explicitly infatuated with Dorian Gray. He does admire Dorian's beauty and is very fond of him. In addition, he never doubts to display his misogynistic views on women and he does not demonstrate any romantic feelings towards his wife, who abandons him at the end of the novel. Nevertheless, due to the lack of sensual interactions with other characters, his sexual orientation remains mysterious.

However, his counterpart, Basil Hallward is the perfect example of this punishment. Furthermore, he is the only character who experiences the self-realisation of his own sexual orientation. This takes place in the moment that Dorian Gray enters the painter's life: "When our eyes met, I felt that I was growing pale. A curious sensation of terror came over me. [...] Something seemed to tell me that I was on the verge of a terrible crisis in my life. I had a strange feeling that Fate had in store for me exquisite joys and exquisite sorrows" (Wilde, 7). Basil senses here the beginning of a big change in his life, which is related to his newfound desire for men, and it also works as an omen for the upcoming tragedy that was pending upon this character. This desire for Dorian tortures the painter whose jealousy is openly displayed at the beginning of the novel when he denies Lord Henry an introduction to his new friend:

'I wish I had known it was your friend.'

‘I am very glad you didn’t, Harry.’

‘Why?’

‘I don’t want you to meet him.’

‘You don’t want me to meet him?’

‘No.’ (Wilde, 14-15)

Basil explicitly forbids Lord Henry to meet Dorian Gray, which indicates strong feelings of devotion and a need to protect the young lad from the very first stages of the story, since Basil is aware that his friend, Lord Henry, would be a great corrupting force for someone who does not have a strong personality. This need to protect Dorian reaffirms the hypothesis of Basil’s role as the Oedipal mother whose love goes beyond Dorian’s actions and whose love results in Basil being murdered before boarding the train to Paris. Dorian moves from love to hatred towards him, once he convinced himself that it was Basil the one who damaged him by painting the picture that contains his soul and that now haunts him. Dorian, who was introduced as Basil’s muse and friend, becomes his murderer.

These queer characters met their tragic endings due to the huge gap between homosexuality and the dominant heteronormativity of 19th-century London. Jeff Nunokawa describes this society as “a regime which lodges desire and identity in a tautological relation; a regime that defines who I am as what I want” (313), that is to say, that a person’s worth is defined by what she or he desires. For this reason, it is necessary to note that Wilde’s novel presents a new model of masculinity heavily influenced by Aestheticism in the tradition of other aesthetes such as Walter Pater and Algernon Charles Swinburne, which could be described as more delicate than the classic conception because it focuses on this philosophy of defining a person for what they want. The main characters

are interested in luxurious items, such as fabrics, parties, parfums and gossip, elements that tend to be placed within the feminine realm. This pleasure for refined things represents a new masculinity emerging for the gentleman of Late Victorian London, which seems to be perfectly normal and accepted in this novel and which is also linked to what Freud considered “a feminine attitude” that he attributed to homosexual behaviour. Wilde is exploring in his Aesthetic minoritizing discourse —since it was not very popular nor adopted by the majority of gentleman— the “possibilities for gender identifications and sexual practices for men within a secure framework of masculinity” (Morgan, 318), escaping in this manner the traditional roles for manliness: “the philosopher, the saint, the artist” (Morgan, 319).

To conclude drawing on Freud, the Oedipus Complex is key to understanding Dorian Gray’s personality and his sexual orientation. As explained above, the failure to master this complex resulted in Dorian’s search for parental figures to undergo the process of Identification along with the establishment of his sexual orientation. This anomaly in Dorian Gray’s development derived in the preservation of the bisexuality originally present in all children. Freud, a man of his time, offers us complicated and sometimes contradictory views on the topic. On the one hand, he did not see homosexuality as a sickness, but on the other hand, he did treat it as a psychopathology. In addition, he also introduced the concept of bisexuality in children, which is a very advanced idea for his time. Oscar Wilde’s scandalous novel introduces this controversial topic with a subtlety which was probably used to protect himself from the public’s reception of his ideas, as well as his decision to write tragic endings for his homoerotic characters.



Chapter 4

Me, Myself and I: Narcissism and the Double

When one thinks of the infamous character Dorian Gray, what immediately comes to mind is the extreme narcissism of this character and the portrait that contains the mysteries of his rotten soul. Both of these elements are linked and constitute the key to understand Dorian Gray's personality and his actions in the novel. In this chapter, Gray's narcissism and sexuality will be analysed while being compared to another well-known character in literary history, Narcissus from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8 AD). The origin of their narcissistic awakening will be studied along with the distribution of their libido according to Freud's theory on the topic. Furthermore, the relationship between narcissism and the formation of a doppelganger or double will be tackled in light of Freud's contribution to the field. The role of the double is more clearly taken on in this novel by the portrait of the title. For this, it is necessary to include in the discussion Freud's theorisation of the uncanny, connected in the novel to Basil Hallward's painting of Dorian. For this purpose, Freud's arguments in *On Narcissism: An Introduction* (1914) will be an essential tool along with many other of Freud's works, principally, in this connection, *The Uncanny* (1919).

The term narcissism as a psychoanalytical concept was introduced in the late 19th century and was related to auto-erotism. The first author to introduce systematically this term in the psychoanalytic field was the Viennese doctor and psychoanalyst Isidor Isaak Sadger (1867-1942) in an article published in 1908. Since Sadger's reinterpretation of this concept, an ongoing debate was held amongst the members of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society until 1914 (Padovan, 646), when Freud finally delineated and

integrated the term into psychoanalytic theory in his essay *On Narcissism: An Introduction* (1914). He defined narcissism thus:

The term narcissism is derived from clinical description and was chosen by Paul Näcke in 1899 to denote the attitude of a person who treats his own body in the same way in which the body of a sexual object is ordinarily treated— who looks at it, that is to say, strokes it and fondles it till he obtains complete satisfaction through these activities. (Freud, *On Narcissism: An Introduction*, 72)

It must be noted, however, that Freud declared that there are different degrees of narcissism and in a healthy low level it meant “a necessary intermediate stage between auto-erotism and object-love” (Freud, *On Narcissism: An Introduction*, 68). If, however, narcissistic attachment is carried to an extreme, it has the “significance of a perversion that has absorbed the whole of the subject’s sexual life, and it will consequently exhibit the characteristics which we expect to meet with in the study of all perversions” (Freud, *On Narcissism: An Introduction*, 72). For this reason, it is important to distinguish between Dorian Gray’s extreme narcissism and primary and normal narcissism, the latter would not be considered a perversion and it would be just a “libidinal complement to the egoism of the instinct of self-preservation, a measure of which may justifiably be attributed to every living creature” (Freud, *On Narcissism: An Introduction*, 72-73). He fits perfectly into this second category since he is completely mesmerised by his own beauty, which is particularly noticeable when he contemplates the portrait Basil Hallward did of him, a climactic moment that marks a turning point in Dorian’s personality:

When he saw it he drew back, and his cheeks flushed for a moment with pleasure. A look of joy came into his eyes, as if he had recognised himself for the first time. He stood there motionless and in wonder, dimly conscious that Hallward was speaking to him, but not catching the meaning of his words. The sense of his own beauty came on him like a revelation. He had never felt it before. (Wilde, 27)

He felt in love with his own reflection at this precise point, just like Narcissus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8AD), one of the mythical origins of the concept of narcissism. Both characters, Narcissus and Dorian Gray, are doomed once they fall in love with themselves. In the narrative poem *Metamorphoses*, Narcissus experiences the same narcissistic joy that Dorian feels once he sees his portrait:

He dreams upon
a love that's bodiless: now he
believes that what is but a shade must be a
body. And he gazes in dismay
at his own self; he cannot turn away his eyes;
he does not stir; he is as still as any statue
carved of Parian marble
Stretched out along the ground, he stares again,
again at the twin stars that are his eyes;
at his fair hair, which can compare with
Bacchus' or with Apollo's; at his beardless
cheeks
and at his ivory neck, his splendid mouth, the

pink blush on a face as white as snow; in sum,
he now is struck with wonder by what's
wonderful in him. Unwittingly,
he wants himself he praises, but his praise is
for himself; he is the seeker and the sought, the
longed-for and the one who longs; he is the
arsonist—and is the scorched. (Ovid, 94)

Narcissus' description of his own self coincides with Freud's description of narcissism since he is treating himself as a love object. Both Dorian and Narcissus experience a narcissistic delight once they are aware of their appearance. In the quote above, the poetic voice uses a very romantic language to describe Narcissus; metaphors like “the twin stars that are his eyes” (Ovid, 94) or elevating him using comparisons to the gods. Both stay motionless once they see themselves for the first time, as if the veil of humbleness that used to cover them had fallen and they can now see themselves with pride and fill their hearts with arrogance.

The second Dorian notices his handsome appearance, the libido is withdrawn from the external world into his Ego. When Freud addresses the term libido, he is referring to an “instinctual physiological or psychic energy associated with sexual urges and, in his later writings, with all constructive human activity” (The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica). Freud's Libido Theory explains the transformation of erotic libido, whose aim is an object, and ego libido, which consists of the libido targeting the Ego. As Freud claims in his book *The Ego and the Id* (1923):

At the very beginning all the libido is accumulated in the id, while the ego is still in process of formation or far from robust. Part of this libido is sent out by the id into erotic object-cathexes, whereupon the ego, now growing stronger, attempts to obtain possession of this object-libido and to force itself upon the id as a love-object. The narcissism of the ego is thus seen to be secondary, acquired by the withdrawal of the libido from objects. (65)

Unlike normal people and their normal narcissism, when Dorian reaches the peak of his narcissism, he is unable to love because his libido is completely withdrawn into his Ego and no energy is displaced onto an object in the outside world. As it is noticeable, Dorian Gray's new-found sense of self affects every aspect of his life, including his sexuality and the selection of an object-cathexis. Dorian's narcissistic attitude keeps increasing during the novel until he admits to himself and Lord Henry that he is not able to love: "‘I wish I could love,’ cried Dorian Gray, with a deep note of pathos in his voice. ‘But I seem to have lost the passion, and forgotten the desire, I am too much concentrated on myself. My own personality has become a burden to me’" (Wilde, 230). These lines signal the peak of Dorian's narcissism and the beginning of his downfall. Dorian has reached a point of no return and he feels trapped in his own skin. The word Dorian used to describe what his personality meant to himself, "burden", is very important to this analysis since it indicates the suffering of accumulating an excessive amount of Ego libido, for, as Freud constantly warns his readers, an excessive accumulation of ego-libido inevitably leads to sickness. The libido is invested on his Ego alone and he is not able anymore to place some of this psychic energy on an object from the outside world, as he had done with Sybil Vane in the past. Once again, Narcissus also shares Dorian's pain from investing too much libido on himself:

‘O woods, you are the ones to testify:
among your trees so many lovers hide
their grief. Do you remember anyone
in your long life—those many centuries—
whose love consumed him more than mine wastes me?’ (Ovid, 95)

Narcissus is also consumed by not loving anybody but himself. The vocabulary used here gives a sense of how much this psychic dynamics has affected him since he declares to be “consumed” and “wasted” by himself.

According to Freud, loving someone is essential for balanced, healthy personality. Freud considered this type of love the “highest phase of development of which object libido is capable [...] when the subject seems to give up his own personality in favour of an object- cathexis” (Freud, *On Narcissism: An Introduction*, 75). He believed in the importance of the difference between ‘ego-libido’ and ‘object-libido’, which are crucial elements in the personality of the subject, the first is directed towards the Ego and the second is attached to objects. The previous passage from *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, where Dorian’s narcissism arises after beholding his portrait, aligns perfectly with Freud’s theory of narcissism and its libidinal vicissitudes as formulated, above all, in *On Narcissism: An Introduction* (1914), where he claimed that “a strong egoism is a protection against falling ill, but in the last resort we must begin to love in order not to fall ill, and we are bound to fall ill if, in consequence of frustration, we are unable to love” (85). Dorian Gray is so self-centred that he cannot love, which makes him fall ill with paranoia that leads to his suicide. This type of paranoia might be what Freud denominated paranoic’s phantasy (or self-perception) of the end of the world and might have arisen due

to this inability to invest psychic energy on an object. However, according to Freud, libidinal introversion is not the only case in which this type of paranoia could be developed. This condition has two different mechanisms: “in the one case, the whole libidinal cathexis flows off to the loved object; in the other, it all flows back into the ego” (Freud, *On Narcissism: An Introduction*, 75). The first mechanism indicates that there is no Ego-libido and therefore leads to paranoia due to all the libido flying off to the love object, leaving a person with no balance between ego-libido and object-libido. It is the latter the one that applies to Dorian’s case more clearly since, as it has been explained, he is not capable of falling in love with an object other than himself.

In order to understand how Dorian Gray reached this point of no return, it is crucial to analyse his replica, the picture. The portrait painted by his friend and admirer, Basil Hallward, played a critical role in the formation of Dorian’s narcissistic personality and functioned as the double of Freudian theory. This instance of the doppelganger, the portrait, gave him a strong desire for immortality and arose a feeling of jealousy towards his own immortal replica:

‘How sad it is!’ murmured Dorian Gray, with his eyes still fixed upon his own portrait. ‘How sad it is! I shall grow old, and horrible, and dreadful. But this picture will remain always young. It will never be older than this particular day of June... If it were only the other way! If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that—for that— I would give everything! Yes, there is nothing in the whole world I would not give! I would give my soul for that!’ (Wilde, 28)

After the great joy of discovering his own beauty came the desolating truth of the passing of time. In this passage, Dorian's desperation is remarkable as he offers his own soul in order not to grow older for mere frivolous reasons, such as remaining beautiful and young. Despite being a frivolous desire, this is a very humane and spread narcissistic wish since narcissism is also a universal dynamic. Therefore, his jealousy towards this mirror image reaches its zenith and a new desire for immortality awakens in Dorian. These obscure feelings and the idea of the portrait coincides with Freud's idea of the double which is described as the following:

The appearance of persons who have to be regarded as identical because they look alike. This relationship is intensified by the spontaneous transmission of mental processes from one of these persons to the other- what we would call telepathy- so that the one becomes co-owner of the other's knowledge, emotions and experience. (Freud, *The Uncanny*, 141-142)

Dorian Gray and his portrait do experience this mental transmission since the portrait works as a critical conscience for the young lad showing him, through the changes in its appearance, how his actions affect his soul. The picture seems to function as Dorian Gray's soul; therefore, they are undeniably connected. According to Christopher Craft's views on the double theory: "A viewing subject replicated in a mirror may be said to return to where he started, but not *as* she started. For she starts as a human being replete with such presence as persons may claim, yet returns to himself as an image- being devoid of precisely *this* presence" (109-110). However, after Dorian Gray's wish about having his portrait carry all the inconveniences of ageing and living an immoral life, he obtains a mirror, the portrait, which is not just a superficial image of him anymore, but a being

with the sort of *presence* that a person has and that Craft wrote about, a being with a soul that can be considered another character in the novel —so much so that we may even go as far as to consider the picture the co-protagonist, the title-character that literally reflects the development of Gray's soul.

This unusual character acquires the ability of carrying the burdens of Dorian's existence turning him into an immortal being. The immortality that Dorian obtains from his wish cannot be overlooked since it is strongly linked to the theory of the double and its origins. "The double was originally an insurance against the extinction of the self or, as Rank puts it, 'an energetic denial of the power of death'" (Freud, *The Uncanny*, 142). The creation of a painting of oneself already gives us a sense of immortality since that portrait is going to outlive us; even in Ancient Egypt "it became a spur to artists to form images of the dead in durable materials" (Freud, *The Uncanny*, 142). Humanity has always searched for a remedy to avoid complete annihilation, such as the idea of the immortal soul who can be considered the first double of the body (Freud, *The Uncanny*, 142). Freud claimed that the meaning of the double changed after surpassing primordial narcissism, where it originated, and "having once been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death" (Freud, *The Uncanny*, 142). Therefore, the concept of the double does not disappear but it "may acquire a new content from later stages in the evolution of the Ego" (Freud, *The Uncanny*, 142). This is very noticeable in Dorian's attitude towards the portrait, after his ardent wish for immortality and his jealousy towards his picture, once he observes the first change in the portrait he is filled with terror: "Surely his wish has not been fulfilled? Such things were impossible. It seemed monstrous even to think of them. And, yet, there was the picture before him, with the touch of cruelty in the mouth." (Wilde, 100).

Oscar Wilde is playing with the feeling of the uncanny, which Dorian experiments when he realises what the portrait is now a reflection of him and of his soul. Freud based his idea of the uncanny in other authors' thoughts on the subject such as Friedrich Schelling (1775- 1854) who applied the term "to everything that was intended to remain secret, hidden away, and has come into the open" (Freud, *The Uncanny*, 132). This definition perfectly applies to Dorian's moment of fright after discovering the cruel change in the mouth of his replica and his decision of hiding the portrait away: "He got up from his chair, and drew a large screen right in front of the portrait, shuddering as he glanced at it. 'How horrible!' he murmured to himself, and he walked across to the window and opened it" (Wilde, 102). The changes in the strange portrait are considered something that must not happen, but they are nevertheless occurring and therefore, the portrait must be hidden. Freud also considered a manifestation of the uncanny all those life events in which the line that divides fantasy from reality is blurred so that they inhabit the same space. This is exactly what happens with Dorian's picture: a magical element, such as a portrait, changes to reflect interior changes going on in the main character, which lives in a real place and in a particular historical period (turn-of-the-nineteenth-century London). This replica of Dorian Gray is the most uncanny element of the novel and this quality "can surely be derived only from the fact that the double is a creation that belongs to a primitive phase in our mental development, a phase that we have surmounted, in which it admittedly had a more benign significance" (Freud, *The Uncanny*, 143). The double does not disappear after the phase where it originates, but it evolves into something different and much stronger that provokes a truly uncanny feeling. However, it is not the only uncanny element of this novel: "narcissism itself is an uncanny experience as it is an example of irreconcilables which entangle in unsettling ways" (Wenaus, 58).

Narcissism is the cause of Dorian's impulse to perform all types atrocities and the reason he wished for the portrait to carry all the burdens of his wicked lifestyle.

To conclude, Dorian Gray is a complex character whose narcissism completely corrupted him, just like another similar character from the *Metamorphoses*, Narcissus. By hoarding ego-libido and not directing any object-libido towards a love object, both of them reached their narcissistic peak as they were incapable of loving someone; and, just as Sigmund Freud warned us in his essay *On Narcissism*, he felt sick because of this excessive amount of ego-libido. Once a mirror was created for these characters (the picture in Gray's case and the reflection of his own body on the crystalline waters of a lake for Narcissus) they were enchanted by their own beauty and increasingly stopped directing libido towards a objects. Wilde used a doppelganger, the double, to create an uncanny atmosphere where the limits of reality and fantasy are completely blurred, aligning perfectly with Freud's theories on the uncanny and the role of the double. This novel is an outstanding fictional rendition of psychoanalytical concepts such as narcissism, the double and the uncanny, which are fundamental elements for the main character's personality.



Conclusion

This dissertation aimed to bring together the psychoanalytic world of Sigmund Freud and Oscar Wilde's complex character, Dorian Gray, in order to conduct an analysis of Dorian's personality from a Freudian psychoanalytic point of view. For this purpose, the three main subjects of study which I have argued about in the different chapters have been: the triad of constituents of the mind (Ego, Id and Superego), homosexuality, and narcissism. The study of these various topics has given a sense of the presence of 19th century psychology in *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* (1891), and has shed some light over the wicked personality of the main character and the evil actions that led him to a fatal destiny.

The analysis of the triad of the mind has shown how unbalanced the twisted mind of Dorian Gray is and how the different areas of the human psyche operate within him. The novel can be considered an outstanding fictional representation of the mind system that Sigmund Freud delineated. The area which is predominant in Dorian is the Id, which is dominated by the passions and looks for immediate gratification. Dorian's Ego tries to fulfil the desires of the Id adjusting them to the morals and rules of society. The Ego would mediate between the Id and the Superego. But, due to his inability to master the Oedipus Complex, the strict Superego, which is the part that inspires one to be a better version of themselves, was not developed until the portrait was created. Here, the unbalanced mind of the protagonist was analysed alongside the theory of how different characters of the novel serve as Oedipal parents to Dorian Gray. Dorian needs parental figures in order to be able to mature and fulfil the Oedipus Complex, a mission that ended up in a tragic failure. Furthermore, at the end of this chapter, I have argued about Wilde's

reflection of his own personality in his three main characters, as Wilde himself affirmed. This is a revelation of himself as a complex human being who struggles with the moral and social standards acceptable in a Victorian gentleman. This analysis was conducted using Sigmund Freud's work as core literature, specifically, the works where he proposed and then fully elaborated his theory of the mind *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and *The Ego and the Id* (1923).

Regarding the topic of homosexuality, the Oedipus Complex is again key to understand Freud's theory of homosexual desire and Dorian Gray's sexuality. As Dorian did not master that complex, the Superego was not developed and he did not experience the process of Identification, which made him look for parental figures to complete these processes, a duty that he was also unable to accomplish. Due to this anomaly in his development, I have suggested that he might have retained the original bisexuality present in children that Freud theorised about in, among other places, *The Ego and the Id* (1923). I found some of Freud's ideas very contradictory since he proposed such original and radical approaches to children's sexuality, but he still considered homosexuality a psychopathology. This makes him an even more interesting subject to study. Wilde himself was also struggling with depicting homosexual male desire while avoiding backlash from his own sexual desire and its conflict with his own Christian guilt.

The last main topic that I have discussed is narcissism, along with the concept of the double. Here, Dorian's narcissistic origins and actions were compared to another important character in literary history, Narcissus from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8 AD). Both undergo a similar process of personal discovery and the obsession with their own beauty. Furthermore, I explained how the libido theory operates in Dorian and in regular human beings, while highlighting the importance of directing libido toward objects and not just hoarding Ego-libido to avoid sickness. The Freudian concept of the double was

also presented in relation with narcissism since it is a form of self-preservation, a wish for immortality embodied by the portrait, and the origin of Dorian Gray and Narcissus' extreme narcissistic tendencies. The theoretical bases of this research were Freud's essay *On Narcissism* (1914) and *The Uncanny* (1919).

This dissertation has provided the classic Freudian psychoanalytic approach to this literary classic of the 19th century and, more specifically, to the main character of this narrative, one of the most infamous figures in literary history, Dorian Gray. Further studies could explore Jacques Lacan's (1901-1981) perspective on the subject, such as the relationship between Dorian's portrait, , Lacan's mirror stage and the latter's radical and far-reaching reformulation of the Freudian Superego.

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