The Picture of Dorian Gray

Study Guide by Course Hero

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Book Basics

AUTHOR
Oscar Wilde

YEAR PUBLISHED
1890

GENRE
Fantasy, Horror, Philosophy

PERSPECTIVE AND NARRATOR
The Picture of Dorian Gray has a third-person omniscient narrator, whose characterization of events is not always just or objective.

TENSE
The Picture of Dorian Gray is told in the past tense.

ABOUT THE TITLE
The title *The Picture of Dorian Gray* has a double meaning. It refers to the magical portrait reflecting Dorian's darker actions and also to the novel itself, which provides a fuller picture of Dorian.

In Context

Homosexuality

There is no explicit homosexuality in the edition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* most people read. However, there is extensive homoeroticism and implied or suggested homosexual activity. This starts in Chapter 1, when Lord Henry Wotton and artist Basil Hallward discuss a painting of Dorian Gray. They linger on Dorian's beauty, and Basil reports going pale when Dorian first met his eyes. After Basil introduces Lord Henry to the flesh-and-blood Dorian, he continues to work on a portrait of the young man. Lord Henry doesn't focus on the painting but instead stares at the beautiful Dorian. There is an atmosphere of possessiveness among the three men, along with a jockeying for position, which makes more sense if readers assume physical attraction.

Later in the book, Chapter 12, Wilde comes close to making Dorian's homosexual activity explicit. Basil asks Dorian, "Why is your friendship so fatal to young men?" and says there are rumors about Dorian—"stories that [he has] been seen creeping at dawn out of dreadful houses and slinking in disguise into the foulest dens in London." Period reviewers found the novel scandalous and immoral because of these insinuations. One reviewer linked the novel to a famous homosexual incident from the period: the "Cleveland Street Affair," involving English aristocrats frequenting a male brothel.

More generally, homosexuality played a major role in Wilde's life, and he was carrying on a so-called unseemly relationship with the younger poet, Lord Alfred Douglas. Britain's attitude toward homosexuality also shapes this novel.

Homosexual activity was considered a criminal act in Britain and was punishable by death until 1861. Such consequences are a glaring violation of human and civil rights. Sexual activities between consenting adult men remained punishable by prison terms into the mid-20th century. In the latter half of the 20th century, Britain's Sexual Offenses Act decriminalized homosexual activity, and associated legislation has lowered the age of consent to 16.

Fantastic Literature

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* Oscar Wilde draws on elements of several different types of fantastic literature, a genre that incorporates elements of the supernatural or other worlds that defy realistic explanation. Wilde had published a collection of fairy tales in 1888 titled *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*, and this novel definitely has fairy tale elements. Dorian's wish inexplicably has magical power. The painting changes, but Dorian does not. Sibyl calls Dorian "Prince Charming." Beyond these specific elements, the way Wilde stylizes and simplifies reality here echoes the fairy tale genre.

Gothic literature exposed the dark side of the romantic movement in literature. Where romanticism saw the good in emotion, Gothic literature showed the danger of excess passion and irrationality. Romantics saw ruins as picturesque; Gothic authors warned of ruins holding secrets or even curses. Gothic literature was a mature tradition by the time Wilde published *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and he was one of a number of authors in the period (such as Robert Louis Stevenson) who adapted gothic techniques for philosophical and critical ends. This novel applies several other gothic clichés, like the doubled self, forbidden knowledge, intense passions, and life-threatening hidden secrets.

Finally, though this is the weakest element of the fantastic found in the novel, there are traces of science fiction in *Dorian Gray*, such as Basil's longstanding interest in the "methods of natural science" mentioned in Chapter 4, and in the way Dorian seeks an explanation for how Basil's painting of him changes in Chapters 7 and 8.

The Aesthetic Movement

The 19th century was a practical, businesslike time. It was marked by urbanization, industrialization, function, and an emphasis on wealth. The middle class rose in power during this period. As is common historically, when one social trend emerges, other movements arise to push in opposite directions. Early in the century, England saw romantics embracing nature as an alternative to industry. Just after the middle of the century, the aesthetic movement emerged. Members of the aesthetic movement believed in the motto popularized by French poet Théophile Gautier: "Art for art's sake." The Victorians valued art that supported a useful social cause or that carried a moral message. For the aesthetics beauty was enough in itself. Wilde was strongly influenced by this movement. He knew people, like art critic Walter Pater, who helped shape the movement in Britain. Pater influenced Wilde heavily, and Wilde took the critic's book on the Renaissance with him when he traveled. He even went so far as to memorize sections of the volume.

A skilled author, Wilde incorporated the aesthetics' philosophy of beauty in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* while also critiquing it in the same work. After Dorian, Lord Henry Wotton is the most important character in the novel, and he spends more time explaining his philosophy than Dorian does his. Lord Henry is a dandy who places a great deal of importance on keeping up appearances and engaging in leisurely pursuits. The philosophy he articulates is very much an aesthetic one. In Chapter 2 he gives a speech to Dorian in Basil's garden that changes Dorian forever by awakening him to the power and importance of his own beauty, saying, among other things, "And beauty is a form of genius—is higher, indeed, than genius, as it needs no explanation. It is of the great facts of the world, like sunlight." This is an unflinching celebration of sensual beauty. However, Wilde follows this by showing Dorian living this philosophy and ruining many lives in the process.

Author Biography

Born on October 16, 1854 in Dublin, Ireland, Oscar Wilde lived a life that was in many ways as colorful and dramatic as those of the characters he invented. He came from an established and well-respected family in which his mother was an accomplished poet and translator, and his father was a doctor

who was knighted for his service in the Irish census. An uncle also served in the Irish Parliament.

Wilde received a first-rate education, attending Portora Royal School, Trinity College Dublin and then Oxford. He won honors at each institution, first for his scholarship and then for his writing. After graduating Wilde began a varied literary career that was at first very successful and then highly notorious. Wilde published poetry, criticism, fiction (including fairy tales), and plays. While some of his poetry and fairy tales are still read, it was his work in the other three genres that won him literary immortality. Essays such as "The Decay of Lying" (1889) and "The Critic as Artist" (1891) make their cases through conversations among paired selves representing different components of an argument, a structure Wilde followed both in his most famous play, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), and in his one novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

On August 30, 1889, J.M. Stoddard, managing editor of the American magazine *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, hosted a dinner in London. That evening he solicited stories from two very different authors: Oscar Wilde and Arthur Conan Doyle—the writer who created Sherlock Holmes. That request produced *The Sign of Four* (1890) from Doyle and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* from Wilde. Although Doyle's story was immediately celebrated, Wilde's story received a much more negative response, even from Stoddard himself, who cut 500 words from the manuscript before he published it in one installment in 1890, having edited the story to make the references to homosexuality less explicit. However, that wasn't enough to save Wilde from controversy. Critics objected to the story, suggesting it was written specifically for a homosexual audience. In response Wilde edited the story still further, adding six chapters and a preface and toning down the sexual content before it was published as a book in 1891 by Ward, Lock and Co.

Even with Wilde's edits, the controversy generated by the novel caused problems for the author at the time his career had begun to blossom. In 1895 during the run of his most famous play, *The Importance of Being Earnest,* at St. James's Theater in London, Wilde got into legal trouble over a homosexual affair with a younger man, Lord Alfred Douglas. Douglas, incidentally, adored *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* and said he read it 14 times. Wilde was charged with "gross indecency," and the novel was part of the evidence used against Wilde at this trial. Wilde spent two years in prison starting in 1895, and when he emerged, he lived barely five more years. During the autumn of 1900, he lived in Paris at the Hôtel d'Alsace under the name Sebastian Melmoth. On November 30, 1900, at age 46, Wilde died there without enough money to pay his hotel bill.

For more than a century, readers were able to experience *The Picture of Dorian Gray* only in the watered-down versions published in 1890 and 1891. This changed in 2011, when scholar Nicholas Frankel published a version of the novel with the original sexual references restored.

Characters

Dorian Gray

Four characters are essential to this novel, and the most important of these is Dorian Gray. Dorian and his beauty are at the heart of this story. Dorian is as young, pure, and stunningly beautiful when the novel opens as the image Basil Hallward paints of him. Unlike the rest of humanity, however, Dorian stays forever young, while Basil's painting of him ages and shows signs of each immoral act Dorian commits. Dorian may be beautiful, but he is shallow, self-centered, and self-destructive. In Dorian, Wilde creates a complicated character portrait. Wilde cared greatly for beauty and argued for it's needing no further justification. However, the portrait he paints of Dorian is actually quite repulsive. This man may be physically lovely, but he leaves a trail of broken hearts, ruined reputations, and dead bodies behind him. Dorian's name is important, but ambiguous. His last name, gray, suggests he is morally neither black nor white (or that he could be either black or white). His first name blends multiple possible meanings. The Dorians were a Hellenic people, and Doris was a sea nymph in Greek mythology, which would align with Dorian's beautiful mother and his own essentially supernatural beauty. In French, d'or would mean "of gold," or "golden," which would also describe Dorian's great beauty. This name can also be read as a covert reference to a specific model of male homosexual relationship, between an older and younger man, known as "Greek" or "Dorian" love.

Basil Hallward

Basil is the second of the four characters at the heart of this novel. Basil is a mature man. He's an artist who is otherwise quite conventional. He is concerned with reputation and good character, but also with creating and capturing beauty. Since he is the primary artist in the novel, the preface should be read as addressing him. Wilde opens his preface with "The artist is the creator of beautiful things." That's somewhat the case here: Basil does create a beautiful portrait of Dorian. But it is beautiful in part because Basil lets his worship of Dorian slip into the painting—and it doesn't remain beautiful. Only Dorian does. Does that mean Basil creates Dorian? It does, in part: he certainly facilitates Dorian's supernatural status. However, it is up to another character to bring Dorian fully into being: Henry Wotton.

Lord Henry Wotton

Early in his preface to this novel, Oscar Wilde writes, "The critic is he who can translate into another manner or a new material his impression of beautiful things." If that's the case, Lord Henry is, among other things, a critic. Where Basil paints but does not necessarily explain his art, Henry explains beauty, art, and life in a way that fundamentally changes Dorian. Basil may capture Dorian's beauty on canvas, but it is Henry who explains what it means in a way that awakens Dorian to its significance. Henry is also a cynic and a dandy. He lives with his life on display to the world, for pleasure, and, he claims, entirely by his own lights. About the three main characters in the novel, Oscar Wilde once wrote, "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."

Sibyl Vane

Sibyl Vane's name is deeply symbolic. In ancient Greece sibyls were oracles at holy sites. The gods spoke through them. Sibyl Vane, however, is an actress, and the divinities who speak through her are human artists. She and Dorian are variations on the same idea; they are living art. Her last name has various meanings. She is very beautiful, and it would be appropriate for her to be vain, but she's not. Instead, sadly she lives in vain, dying young as a result of her naivety and her complex relationship with her art. Her blossoming love for Dorian moves her as the wind moves a weathervane, changing her view of life and thus her previously all-consuming dedication to her acting. Sibyl is young and poor. She pours herself wholly into her acting because she desperately needs to escape her reality, and acting allows her to imagine a good life for herself. Once Dorian loves her, her performances suffer. She says it is because she no longer needs acting to escape in this way. If that's the case readers might well wonder why Basil paints so very well. What is he escaping that he paints Dorian as well as he does?

James Vane

Sibyl Vane's protective younger brother, James, is also known as "Jim." He distrusts the aristocratic suitor whom Sibyl and their mother know as "Prince Charming." He vows to kill the prince if he ever harms Sibyl. James joins the navy and leaves for Australia just before Dorian dumps Sibyl—and before her death. Years later James returns to England and embarks on a long search to find the man he considers responsible for his sister's death. By chance he hears a woman refer to someone as "Prince Charming"; he grabs hold of the man, who is Dorian, intending to kill him. When Dorian points out that he is much too young to be the person James seeks, James is horrorstruck and apologizes. He then finds out that the seemingly young man is the culprit and somehow tracks Dorian to his country estate. Lying in wait to kill Dorian, James manages to be in the wrong place at the wrong time and is accidentally shot by one of Dorian's guests. James thus becomes the second person in his family to die violently through a connection to Dorian Gray.

Character Map

- Main character
- Other Major Character
- Minor Character

Full Character List

Character	Description
Dorian Gray	Dorian is a beautiful young man whose magical relationship with his portrait allows him to remain young while the portrait ages.
Basil Hallward	An artist, Basil is attracted to Dorian and paints the magical picture of him.
Lord Henry Wotton	Also known as "Harry," Henry is an older gentleman whose combined cynical and hedonistic wisdom influences Dorian.
Sibyl Vane	Sibyl is a 17-year-old actress and Dorian's brief romantic partner.
James Vane	Sibyl Vane's brother, James Vane swears vengeance on Dorian after Sibyl Vane kills herself.
Lady Agatha	Henry Wotton's aunt, Lady Agatha takes Dorian under her wing to introduce him to society.
Lady Brandon	An upper-class hostess, Lady Brandon introduces Dorian Gray to Henry Wotton.
Sir Thomas Burdon	Sir Thomas is a radical member of Parliament and a guest at Aunt Agatha's luncheon.
Alan Campbell	Alan Campbell, a scientist, is Dorian's former intimate whom he blackmails into disposing of Basil's body.
Lady Alice Chapman	Lady Alice is the daughter of Lady Narborough—Dorian's hostess on the night he disposes of Basil's body.
Lady Alice Chapman's husband	Lady Alice Chapman's husband is a friendly but dull guest of Lady Narborough.
Sir Geoffrey Clouston	The Duchess of Monmouth's brother, Sir Geoffrey accidentally kills James Vane.
Margaret Devereux	Margaret Devereux is Dorian Gray's mother. Her father has her husband murdered shortly before Dorian's birth, and Margaret herself dies within a few months.
Mrs. Erlynne	Mrs. Erlynne is a lisping, red-haired guest of Lady Narborough; described as a "pushing nobody," she is a social climber.
Mr. Erskine of Treadley	Mr. Erskine is a wise, but largely silent, friend of Aunt Agatha's.
Lord Faudel	Lord Faudel is a bald, intelligent, and boring friend of Aunt Agatha's.
Lord George Fermor	Lord Fermor is Henry's Uncle George; he reveals Dorian's family history.
Madame de Ferrol	Madame de Ferrol is a much-married aristocrat— and a subject of discussion at Lady Narborough's party.
Francis	Francis is Dorian's servant in the latter part of the novel.
Lady Gwendolen	Lady Gwendolen is Henry's sister and Dorian's partner in a scandalous love affair.
Hansom driver	This unnamed man drives Dorian to the opium den.
Duchess of Harley	The Duchess of Harley is a plump, good-natured guest of Aunt Agatha's.
Ernest Harrowden	Ernest Harrowden is a guest of Lady Narborough—although he has no enemies, he is not well liked by his friends.
Mr. Hubbard	Mr. Hubbard is the frame maker who helps Dorian move his portrait upstairs into hiding.
Mr. Hubbard's assistant	Mr. Hubbard's assistant helps Mr. Hubbard move the portrait upstairs.

Mr. Isaacs	Mr. Isaacs manages the theater where Dorian falls for Sibyl Vane.
Lord Kelso	Lord Kelso—Dorian Gray's mean-spirited maternal grandfather—raises him following the deaths of Dorian's parents.
Mrs. Leaf	Mrs. Leaf is Dorian's housekeeper.
Hetty Merton	Hetty Merton is the young woman Dorian romances but decides not to seduce as part of his effort to change late in the novel.
Duchess of Monmouth	Gladys, the Duchess of Monmouth, flirts with Dorian and verbally fences with Henry in Chapter 17.
Duke of Monmouth	A weary 60-year-old man, the Duke of Monmouth is Gladys's husband.
Lady Narborough	The aristocratic Lady Narborough hosts a party in Chapter 15, and suggests Dorian is in love.
Lady Ruxton	Lady Ruxton is a plain, overdressed, middle-aged guest of Lady Narborough.
Adrian Singleton	Adrian Singleton is a man Dorian encounters at an opium den and later ruins.
Thornton	Thornton is the gamekeeper for the hunt at which James Vane is killed.
Mrs. Vandeleur	Mrs. Vandeleur is a saintly but dowdy friend of Aunt Agatha's.
Mrs. Vane	Mrs. Vane is the impoverished and shallow mother of James and Sibyl Vane.
Victor	Victor is Dorian's servant early in the novel; Dorian dismisses him after killing Basil.
Oscar Wilde	Oscar Wilde, the book's author, writes a preface to the text.
Woman in opium den	This unnamed woman is someone who was ruined by Dorian decades earlier; by calling him "Prince Charming," she alerts James Vane to his identity.
Lady Victoria Wotton	Lady Victoria is Lord Henry's wife, also referred to as Lady Henry; she eventually divorces him.

Plot Summary

The Picture of Dorian Gray is set in 19th-century England and focuses on the title character as he passes from innocence and beauty to immorality and death.

When the novel opens Lord Henry Wotton is visiting his friend Basil Hallward. Basil is painting Dorian Gray's portrait. Henry admires the painting, but Basil worries he let too much of his feelings for Dorian seep into the image. They go into the studio, where Henry chats with Dorian as the young man poses for his portrait. Henry praises Dorian's beauty. When Dorian sees the finished portrait, he realizes that as he ages his portrait will remain young and beautiful. He wishes he could stay young and that the portrait would grow older in his place. The next day Henry visits his uncle and learns Dorian's family background: his mother was beautiful, but she ran away with a poor lover. Thus Dorian will inherit a lot of money.

A month passes. Attending performances at a theater in a poor section of London, Dorian falls in love with an actress he sees there—a young woman named Sibyl Vane. The two barely know each other. Sibyl doesn't even know Dorian's real name, calling him only "Prince Charming." Nevertheless, Dorian tells his friends they will marry. Sibyl is very happy. Her brother James is suspicious: he doesn't like the large class difference between the pair. James also worries about Sibyl because he's about to leave the country to seek his fortune.

Henry and Basil go with Dorian to watch Sibyl act, but her performance is terrible. Sibyl tells Dorian she used to act to escape life, but now that her life is wonderful she no longer can act as she formerly did. Unfortunately, much of what Dorian loved about her was her acting, so he breaks off their engagement. When he gets home he finds a new line in Basil's portrait: cruelty is now visible in the painted face.

After he leaves, Sibyl commits suicide. Dorian is horrified when

he learns about her death the next day. However, Henry talks him into seeing it as something in the past, a learning experience.

Because of the change in the painting, Dorian locks it away where no one will see it. After he has the painting moved, Dorian reads a note from Henry. It includes results of the inquest into Sibyl's death, along with a French novel. Dorian reads this book all day, and he becomes highly influenced by it.

Dorian enters into an extended period of self-indulgence as years pass, and people tell stories about his activities. Some of these are simply sensual, like spending time and money on gems and music. Others are scandalous, immoral, and illegal. However, few people really believe these stories because Dorian appears to retain his youthful innocence and beauty.

On the evening before his 38th birthday, Dorian runs into Basil. Basil warns Dorian about the scandalous stories circulating about him. Basil says he wishes he could be sure the stories were untrue, but that to do that he would have to see Dorian's soul. He laments that "only God can do that." Dorian says he keeps a diary of his soul, and he leads his bewildered friend to see the portrait. Basil is horrified at the sight. Dorian reminds Basil how he wished the painting would age instead of him. They talk about what happened and what it means. Basil concludes Dorian's sins must be terrible indeed for the painting to look like that. Suddenly overcome by anger and loathing, Dorian stabs Basil to death then contacts Alan Campbell, a scientist, with whom he used to be very close. Dorian blackmails Campbell into getting rid of Basil's body.

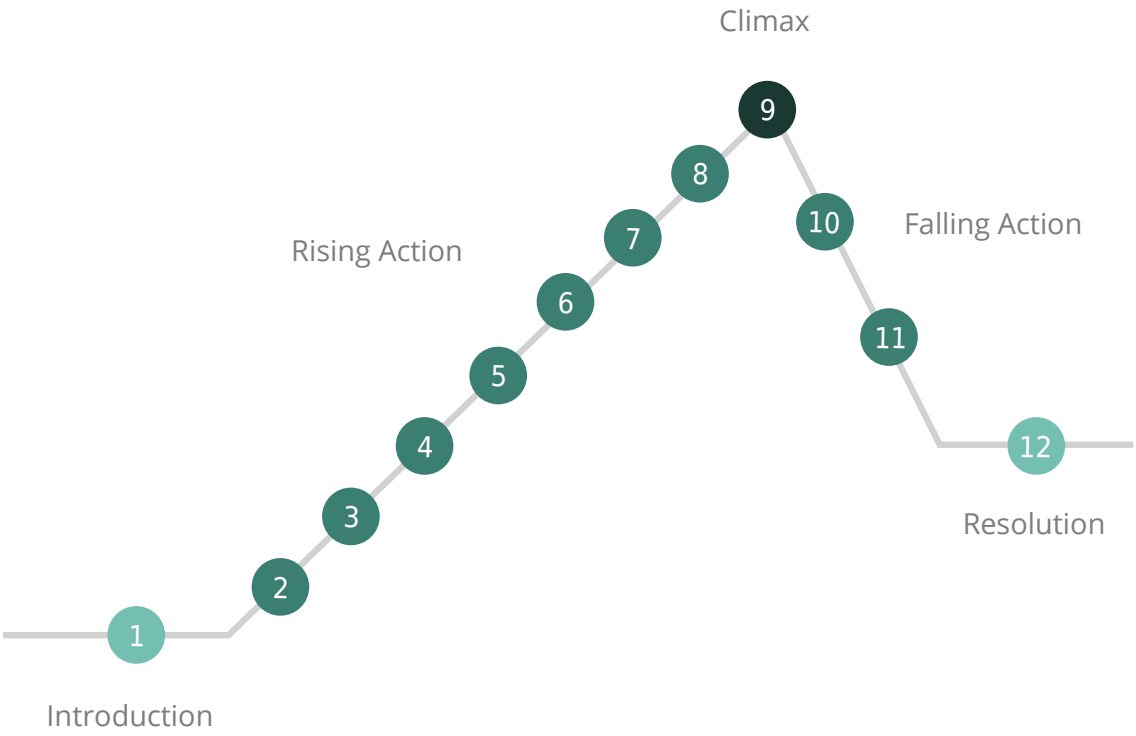
Late that night Dorian goes to an opium den. While he's there, a woman recognizes him and calls him "Prince Charming." A sailor who overhears this address follows Dorian out onto the street. It is James Vane, who wants to kill Dorian for causing his sister's death so many years before. However, when Dorian shows the man his supernaturally youthful face, James concludes it couldn't be Dorian, apologizes, and lets him go. Once he's gone the woman from the opium den tells James it really is the same man.

A week later Dorian faints when he sees James Vane looking in the window during a party. Terrified, Dorian stays home for three days before joining a group of hunters to shoot game. As he walks with a friend, the man shoots at a hare. He kills it—also fatally wounding a man hiding in the bushes. Later the gamekeeper tells Dorian that the dead man wasn't one of his beaters. A beater is an individual who beats at shrubbery—thus startling wild game into leaving their cover and giving hunters a clear shot at their prey. Curious, Dorian inspects the body and finds it is James Vane.

Dorian decides to change his life. However, Henry declares that Dorian should remain as he is, saying he is perfect. Dorian walks home. Once there he thinks about all the lives he has ruined. He resolves again to change. Since he recently chose not to seduce a young woman, he thinks to check his portrait to see if it reflects that decision. He finds the old sins are still visible, along with a new one: hypocrisy. Dorian decides to destroy the painting.

Dorian stabs his portrait, cries out, and falls to the floor. Although his servants hear the shout, they have no key to the locked room. Finally, they enter through a window and find Basil's portrait of Dorian, once again showing Dorian's face as young and beautiful. A withered body lies near the painting. No one can tell who it is. Finally checking the rings on the corpse's hands, they identify the dead man as Dorian Gray.

Plot Diagram



Introduction

1. Basil Hallward paints Dorian Gray's picture.

Rising Action

2. Lord Henry Wotton makes Dorian aware of his own beauty.

3. Dorian wishes the painting would age instead of him.

4. Dorian falls in love with Sibyl Vane.

5. Sibyl cannot act; Dorian dumps her and she kills herself.

6. The first line of age and cruelty appears on the portrait.

7. Henry gives Dorian a book that influences him for years.

8. Dorian indulges in decadent activities for years.

Climax

9. Basil reacts to changes in the painting; Dorian kills him.

Falling Action

10. Dorian blackmails Alan Campbell into disposing of the body.

11. James Vane is accidentally killed while stalking Dorian.

Resolution

12. Dorian stabs the portrait, thus aging and killing himself.

Timeline of Events

A few minutes later

Henry makes Dorian realize his beauty, and Dorian wishes the painting would age instead of him.

A few days later

Dorian breaks up with Sibyl because her acting, once extraordinary, is now terrible.

Two days later

Dorian hides the painting and reads a novel that influences him for years.

Years later

Dorian lets Basil see his transformed portrait, and then kills him for his horrified response.

That night

Dorian visits an opium den, where James Vane recognizes and threatens him.

Late 19th century

Lord Henry Wotton examines Dorian Gray's portrait and discusses him with Basil Hallward.

A month later

Dorian falls in love with Sibyl Vane.

Later that night

Sibyl kills herself and a line of cruelty magically appears on the picture of Dorian.

Years pass

Dorian indulges himself in sensual and immoral activities.

The next day

Dorian blackmails Alan Campbell into disposing of Basil's body.

Three days later

James Vane is accidentally killed while he is stalking Dorian.

A week later

Dorian faints when he sees James Vane through a window.

A day later

Dorian stabs the painting to destroy any evidence of his link to Basil and dies as a result.

Chapter Summaries

Preface

Summary

In the preface Wilde provides readers with key points of the 19th-century aesthetic movement and his views on beauty, the roles of the artist and critic, and the interrelationships between them. He believes that artists (and writers) should create art not for their own fame but simply to display the beauty in the world. Critics—observers or readers—on the other hand should experience the beauty of the work without seeking to interpret or analyze it. People for whom Wilde believes "there is hope" are "the elect to whom beautiful things mean only beauty." Critics who attempt to "go beneath the surface" or to "read the symbol" of artworks "do so at their peril" because in doing so they may attribute meanings to the work that were not intended by the artist.

While artists can paint, sculpt, or write about virtue or vice, their works are neither moral nor immoral. A book, for example, is merely "well written, or badly written," and nothing more. This boils down to the ideas of "art for art's sake" and that art need not serve any practical or moral purpose—hence the concluding epigram, "All art is quite useless."

Analysis

The preface can be read as a defense or counterattack to the criticism leveled at the original narrative published in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*. Most critics who disparaged the 1890 publication cited immoral content. Few people addressed the story as a work of art. Wilde's preface makes the case that beauty is the purpose of art, and its only defense. By implication any criticism made on moral grounds is invalid because it fundamentally misunderstands art. In addition to defending himself, Wilde promotes aestheticism—embracing beauty, art, and artifice. Finally Wilde inserts the character Caliban from Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*. Caliban was Prospero's bestial servant who misunderstood his master's magic (as well as how to act). Using the metaphor of Caliban to refer to a perceived dislike of realism and romanticism can be seen as an attack on the literary tastes of 19th-century society.

Chapter 1

Summary

When visiting his friend Basil Hallward, Lord Henry Wotton praises the portrait Basil is working on and suggests that he display it at London's Grosvenor Gallery. Basil isn't sure he's going to exhibit the painting because he's put too much of himself into it. He has become very fond of the young man who posed for the portrait and is afraid that this will be evident to even casual observers. This revelation leads to a discussion of the beautiful model, Dorian Gray. As the two friends talk about Dorian and other topics—art, marriage, character—Henry remembers he had heard Dorian's name previously, at his Aunt Agatha's. A servant enters and tells Basil that Dorian is in the studio. Before they enter the studio, Basil asks Henry not to "spoil" or influence Dorian in any way.

Analysis

The vivid descriptions of scents and sights signal the importance of the senses. In the third paragraph, Wilde foreshadows one of the major plot twists: Basil's disappearance. The novel's focus on male beauty is introduced here, as this chapter, and many of those that follow, is inhabited only by men. While it was common in Victorian England for men to operate businesses where all the employees were men, *Dorian Gray*'s all-male environment is built around beauty, and the admiration of male beauty. More specifically this chapter establishes the character of both Henry and Basil and their relationship. Both are intelligent and cultured men, but Basil is shaped by his relationship to his art and is more open in his expressions. Henry, by contrast, is stylized throughout. He is brilliantly stylized—his dialogue is a pleasure in itself—but so much so that he's almost a distraction.

Dorian himself does not appear in this chapter. Instead Dorian's portrait does, along with Basil (the artist) and Henry (the critic/commentator). This builds upon Wilde's preface and establishes the art based on Dorian as more important than Dorian himself. It also introduces a number of the novel's

themes. The theme of appearance versus reality is set up as Henry sees Basil's representation of Dorian before he sees him in real life. His later comments on the relationship between appearance and reality set Dorian's character and the novel's plot in motion. Chapter 1 also establishes the tension between art and life that is found throughout the novel. This tension can be seen as early as the second paragraph, when Henry sees bird shadows and is reminded of Japanese paintings. It is made more explicit later in the chapter, when Basil speaks of what Dorian has shown him about art: "But in some curious way—I wonder will you understand me?—his personality has suggested to me an entirely new manner in art, an entirely new mode of style. I see things differently, I think of them differently."

Chapter 2

Summary

Once Henry and Basil enter the studio, Henry and Dorian briefly talk about Aunt Agatha—their shared connection. Henry finds Dorian intensely beautiful and stays to watch Basil work on the portrait. Dorian asks Henry if he is a bad influence. Henry answers at length, explaining all influence is bad. The purpose of human life is for individuals to express their own thoughts and passions. His philosophical ideal is a life that's completely self-centered yet so beautiful it gives joy to everyone else. Dorian asks Henry to stop talking. He thinks about what he's just heard for 10 minutes, without speaking. Basil paints without noticing Dorian's introspection.

When he speaks again, Dorian calls for a break. He goes into the garden. Henry follows. He praises Dorian for smelling the flowers, telling him that the senses can cure the soul. Henry also urges Dorian to move into the shade so he doesn't ruin his beauty, and speaks at length about the meaning of beauty.

They return to the studio. Basil finishes the portrait, and Henry admires it. Dorian, however, is struck by how sad it is that his portrait will stay young and beautiful while he ages. He wishes things were the other way around—that he would remain young and his portrait would age.

Analysis

As cultivated as Henry is, when he first meets Dorian his response to Dorian's beauty is as naive as anyone else's. He thinks there is "something in his face that made one trust him at once." That's both a testament to the power of beauty (Dorian's beauty specifically) and a sign of how it leads everyone in the novel to misjudge others. It is also a commentary on the widespread social tendency to trust beautiful people more than unattractive people.

Three fundamental and related elements of the novel are found in this chapter. First, Henry makes Dorian aware of his own beauty for the first time and raises the thought that, by aging, Dorian will lose his beauty. This sort of observation is a factor that makes Henry a fascinating character. Grasping the fleeting nature of sensory pleasures and one's own life is a tremendous insight—one that can change people. The realization certainly changes Dorian—forever and not for the better. Second, this meeting establishes an ongoing and not particularly healthy relationship between Henry and Dorian. Dorian may be beautiful, but Henry is witty and insightful. Though he denounces all forms of persuasion, this chapter establishes Henry's effect on Dorian in very clear terms. This influence will extend into the very depths of Dorian's soul, as seen when Henry persuades Dorian to put Sibyl's death behind him.

Third, the fairy tale element of the novel is introduced in Chapter 2. When Dorian wishes that Basil's portrait of him would age while he stays young, it should be simply an emotional outburst. It shouldn't have any more effect on the world than anything Basil or Henry say in Chapter 1. But it does. Something responds to Dorian's prayer. At various points in the narrative, Basil and Dorian speculate on how this might have happened, but Wilde never gives a definitive answer. The closest thing that Wilde offers in explanation is found here, in Chapter 2. This explanation seems to be that beauty, youth, and innocence have a power over the world that is almost metaphysical in its intensity.

Chapter 3

Summary

The next day Lord Henry visits Lord George Fermor—his uncle—to learn more about Dorian Gray's background. Lord George explains that Dorian's mother—the beautiful Lady Margaret Devereux—ran off with a poor suitor years ago. When her husband was killed not long after, Lady Margaret also died, shortly after giving birth to Dorian. Dorian is quite wealthy.

Henry then goes to his Aunt Agatha's, thinking about the tragic yet romantic story of Dorian's parentage and of his great beauty. At lunch Henry joins a collection of important people (politicians and aristocrats). As they talk, Dorian's name comes up, and Henry lays claim to him, hoping Dorian will play piano for him. The conversation covers both larger topics (social change, politics) and more personal ones.

Analysis

Classical Greek drama sometimes used a *deus ex machina* to resolve difficult plot points: playwrights had an actor (the god) lowered onto the stage from a crane where he then resolved difficult situations in the plot. In Chapter 3 Wilde employs a *deus ex machina* in the form of Henry's uncle, Lord George. He appears in this chapter and never again. Lord George is a useful, if somewhat unlikely, fountain of information about Dorian's background. On the one hand it makes sense that an older aristocrat would know the gossip of his class. On the other hand, if Dorian is so beautiful and this scandal so extreme, why hadn't Henry known this before? In any case Dorian's romantic background contributes to the fairy tale nature of the plot. He's an orphan and has a history that's extremely dramatic.

The second half of the chapter, when Henry goes to his aunt's for lunch, might at first glance seem unrelated to the first half, or to the rest of the novel. However, the scene serves several functions. It further establishes Henry's character and the breadth of his knowledge, as he can dispense persuasive comments on any topic introduced. It reinforces his cynicism, and his role as an active combatant in the war of the sexes. Henry becomes aware of Dorian watching him and wants to "fascinate" Dorian. This shows Dorian's power in general and the novel's homoerotic tendencies more specifically. And finally Henry's advice to the duchess on how to become young again prefigures the action of the novel: Dorian can do whatever he wants precisely because he doesn't age. Because only his portrait ages, he is free to make the same mistake over and over.

Henry engages in an extended private contemplation about influence and its meaning: this long paragraph serves as a bridge between the two portions of this chapter. Henry has just recently spoken to Dorian about influence being undesirable because it is unnatural and displaces the originality of the person influenced. However, in this section Henry paints quite a different portrait of influence. He compares it to playing a violin, and makes it clear it is a satisfying art form in itself.

Chapter 4

Summary

A month later Dorian is sitting in Henry's library, waiting for Henry. Lady Victoria Wotton, Henry's wife, enters. Dorian refers to her as Lady Henry; using her husband's name in this way was common for the time. She says she would recognize Dorian from the 17 photos her husband has of him and because she had caught sight of him at an opera he attended with Lord Henry. Dorian shares an opinion of the music, which Lady Henry recognizes as one of her husband's opinions. She notes that she regularly hears his opinions quoted by other people.

Henry enters. Once his wife leaves Henry talks dismissively of marriage. This leads to Dorian's sharing his news: he's in love with an actress named Sibyl Vane. Dorian claims she's a genius. Henry says no woman is a genius and asks Dorian how he met her. Dorian had been walking through London, looking for an adventure, when a "hideous Jew" lured him into an unimpressive theater. There Dorian watched a production of *Romeo and Juliet*. Most of the production was unimpressive, but Sibyl, Dorian says, was genius. Since then he's gone to the theater to watch her in different roles. He loves her, and he loves the fact that she's an actress, that she plays so many roles, and that she is never just Sibyl Vane.

When Henry asks Dorian to describe his relationship to Sibyl, Dorian is offended. They have met—they met on the third night Dorian went to the theater—but they aren't involved yet. He says Sibyl is very innocent, and she calls him "Prince Charming." Henry watches Dorian talk about Sibyl, and thinks

about how much he has changed. Dorian wants Henry and Basil to meet Sibyl. Once Dorian leaves, Henry sits alone and thinks about Dorian in love, treating him as an "interesting study." When he gets home, he finds a telegram waiting from Dorian saying he and Sibyl are to be married.

Analysis

Wilde never explicitly explains Lady Henry's nervousness around Dorian. However, since she comments on her husband's 17 pictures of Dorian, at least part of it seems to be jealousy. She is nervous to be around someone her husband adores (whether they are having sex or not). This jealousy seems at least somewhat justified since Lord and Lady Henry are clearly such a bad match. He is stylish, witty, and always in control. She lives in her illusions and is untidy. Theirs is not a deep or happy marriage, and Henry's dismissive comments after his wife leaves document this.

The male characters in this novel inhabit a largely homosocial world, of all men. However, Henry's disregard for Sibyl Vane's *genius*—and his disparagement of women in general—at times tips over into active misogyny on his part.

As for Dorian's love, several points about it are essential. First, Henry's influence on Dorian is at the root of it. The things Henry said to Dorian the first time they met filled him, Dorian says, with a "wild desire to know everything about life." That set him walking the streets in search of experience, and those walks led him to the theater where he met Sibyl. Second, the context in which Dorian meets Sibyl is exceedingly picturesque: in the middle of a tawdry theater, Dorian finds beauty and innocence. This is straight out of a romance novel or a syrupy greeting card. Next, though this is not long after they've met, Dorian is already starting to sound like Henry, especially when he delivers lines such as, "Ordinary women never appeal to one's imagination. They are limited to their century." Dorian's attitude toward women is becoming as mean spirited as Henry's.

And of course this chapter powerfully develops Wilde's themes of the conflict between appearance and reality and between art and life. Sibyl is a particularly striking example of these themes because of how she fuses the two sides of each theme. Sibyl is especially attractive to Dorian because she's an actress. She plays a part. Her life is art, and changing her appearance is a fundamental and daily part of her reality. For all that Dorian sounds exceptionally young when he's talking about her, his comments are also profound. If one accepts that actors connect with other times and characters through their art, then there really would be something special about them.

Chapter 5

Summary

Chapter 5 opens with Sibyl Vane telling Mrs. Vane, her mother, how happy Dorian makes her, although she calls her suitor "Prince Charming" since he has never told her his name. Her mother counters that they owe the theater manager, Mr. Isaacs, a lot of money, so Sibyl must focus on her acting. Sibyl wonders why Prince Charming loves her so much; she apologizes for talking about love when love never worked out for her mother. Mrs. Vane claims Sibyl is inconsiderate to enter into a relationship right now, what with her brother, James, about to leave for Australia. Showing hypocrisy, which she would consider practicality, Mrs. Vane says that if Sibyl's "Prince" is *rich*, a relationship might actually be a good thing.

James enters. Sixteen years of age, he's rather rough around the edges and clumsy—and ready to leave London so he can make his fortune. Although he is unhappy about leaving his family, he wants to earn enough to support his mother and sister so they won't have to act. He's worried about the relationship between Sibyl and this Prince Charming, and he takes Sibyl out for a walk so they can talk without their mother present. Sibyl shares her rosy and naive thoughts about what the future holds for her younger brother—whom she calls "Jim." James is very protective toward Sibyl and expresses his concern about Prince Charming. He has a deep dislike for the upper classes and automatically distrusts the Prince because he's a "gentleman." He is also suspicious because Sibyl doesn't know her suitor's name. They go back to Sibyl's room and then part. In a final conversation with his mother, James confronts her about their father and learns that the two were not married. He calls his father a "scoundrel," but Mrs. Vane defends the man, saying they'd been in love. James swears that if Prince Charming hurts Sibyl he will hunt the man down and kill him.

Analysis

This is the first chapter in which Wilde shifts his focus away from Dorian, Henry, and Basil. He now focuses on another group of three: Sibyl, her mother, and her brother. The members of these two groups could not be more different, and Wilde uses the differences to foreshadow Sibyl's downfall. The members of Dorian's trio are all upper-class gentlemen—they have money and position, both of which buy them a great deal of freedom to act as they please. The Vane family members are poor and in debt. Their actions are restricted by their social and economic conditions, and so James is right to be concerned about the class conflict between Sibyl and her "Prince."

An innocent pursuing a personal fantasy, Sibyl has been influenced during childhood by her mother's wildly theatrical sense of what life *ought* to be like, although it rarely lives up to her expectations. After nearly 20 years Mrs. Vane clings to the notion that her relationship with her upper-class, married lover was both romantic and honorable—and that only death prevented her lover from making financial provisions for her and the children. That Sibyl is content to know Dorian only as "Prince Charming"—a fairy tale hero—demonstrates how far from reality their relationship is. This reliance on childlike imaginings supports the themes of appearance versus reality and art versus life—and should serve as a warning to Sibyl (and the reader) about how badly things will end.

The introduction here of another key plot element—James Vane's promise to find and kill Prince Charming if he hurts Sibyl—provides an example of foreshadowing that will hang over the story for many chapters.

Chapter 6

Summary

Henry and Basil meet for dinner. Henry shares the news that Dorian is engaged. The friends talk about how foolish a choice this is for Dorian, and how marrying an actress is beneath him. Basil asks Henry if he approves. Henry says he no longer approves or disapproves of anything, but in general he doesn't think much of marriage because it makes most people unselfish and dull.

Dorian enters. The older men congratulate him on the engagement. Henry asks to hear about how it happened. Dorian had watched her act (in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*) and went to talk to her afterward. She looked at him lovingly. They kissed. Dorian says their engagement is still secret from her mother. Henry asks if he actually proposed; Dorian is offended, saying that he didn't need to and they have an understanding. He loves her purely, and that's all that is needed. What's more, Dorian says, Sibyl's presence is so pure it lets Dorian reject all of Henry's cynical theories. Henry claims to be baffled by this mention of his theories and says pleasure is the only thing worth having a theory about. Even that, Henry says, is not his theory but nature's: happiness equals goodness equals being true to oneself. If you give in to outside forces, Henry argues, that's criminal. Basil suggests that people who live only for themselves have to pay in suffering. All three men talk more about the nature of pleasure, and then Dorian insists they go with him to the theater to see Sibyl. Henry and Dorian leave and Basil follows, but not before he reflects sadly on Dorian's impending marriage.

Analysis

The talk between Henry and Basil about Dorian's engagement further sharpens the distance and difference between the two friends. Though Basil is an artist, he is much more conventional and straightforward in his response to the news than Henry. And Henry's response is not just original, it inverts a number of commonly held beliefs, such as when he laments the fact that marriage makes people less selfish. One of the things that makes this novel so striking is that both men are right. As Basil argues, because Sibyl is quite a bit below Dorian (in class and money), it is a bad idea and likely to fail. In contrast Henry argues that the experience of marrying—and probably discarding—Sibyl would make Dorian a fascinating study. The men seem to disagree, but both arguments are true.

Once Dorian arrives, despite the influence Henry has exerted on him, he seems very pragmatic about adhering to social expectations. Dorian's assumption that he and Sibyl are engaged even though he never asked her to marry him, is, as Henry indicates, naive and romantic, but not functional.

In this chapter Wilde uses Henry and Basil to articulate the case for and against an aesthetic philosophy. Henry makes a sophisticated philosophical argument, saying, "Believe me, no civilized man ever regrets a pleasure, and no uncivilized man

ever knows what a pleasure is." There is a longstanding tension between nature and culture, with one of the paired terms taking precedence in some philosophies and the other in other schools. In this selection, by claiming this equation is not his but nature's, Henry erases this distinction and claims the upper hand in this debate. He goes on to say that "the important thing" is "one's own life" and that the lives of others are of no concern.

When Henry and Basil discuss the cost of living "merely for one's self," which Henry advocates, Basil suggests that people have to pay not only financially but also "in other ways" such as "in remorse, in suffering, in ... well, in the consciousness of degradation."

The plot of the novel gives Basil's less self-centered argument the last word, and his speech foreshadows Dorian's demise. Dorian's dedication to what seems like an ethereal rather than realistic vision of Sibyl, in contrast to Henry's observances of women, supports the novel's theme of art versus life.

Chapter 7

Summary

When the three men get to the theater, it is more crowded than usual. Henry is appalled by the crowd and surroundings, but Dorian promises Sibyl will transform everything. Basil enters the argument on Dorian's side, saying she must be wonderful to have the effect on audiences that Dorian has described. When Dorian's two friends see Sibyl as Juliet, they immediately agree that she is beautiful. Her acting, however, is unconvincing and leaden. Dorian's friends see it, Dorian sees it, and the crowd sees it. When the second act ends, Henry leaves, unable to bear her mediocre performance any longer. Dorian is upset and sends Basil out with Henry. Dorian watches the rest of the play. By the time it is over, half the audience has left.

Dorian goes backstage to see Sibyl. She greets him with a matter-of-fact comment on the poor quality of her performance. He tries to make an excuse, but Sibyl says she'll never act well again. She explains that, knowing nothing of life and love, she had wholeheartedly believed in the truth—the emotions—of each role she performed. Now, knowing Dorian and his love, she sees the hollowness, the falseness, of acting and the theater. She can no longer act because acting would profane her love. Dorian says she's killed the love he had for her. He heaps abuse on her, saying that he had loved her because "you had genius ... you realized the dreams of great poets and gave shape and substance to the shadows of art." Crying that she has "thrown it all away," he declares, "You are nothing to me now."

She tries to convince him that everything will be okay, but he regards her with contempt and leaves her weeping silently.

After wandering the streets blindly all night, Dorian goes home. Glancing at his portrait, he sees a faint line of cruelty around his mouth. He looks at himself in the mirror, but that line isn't there. He remembers his wish for the painting to grow old while he stays young, and then drifts into a remembrance of the scene with Sibyl and his actions toward her. Dorian goes back and forth in his consideration of the painting and whether it changed or not, alternating with thoughts of Sibyl. He eventually decides he should return to her and try to love her.

Analysis

Chapter 7 is profound, cruel, and fantastical. Throughout history people have put forth theories about where art comes from. One theory is fairly straightforward: art is a kind of escape from reality. People create art to escape their surroundings and create a better world. That's what Sibyl was doing with her acting until she met Dorian. Trapped in poverty and without much real hope for escape, she acted to briefly experience other realities. Wilde presents a tremendous example of situational irony, in which reality contradicts expectation, as Sibyl's tragedy is revealed. Falling in love with Dorian improves Sibyl's life, as she now experiences real emotion. Her love for Dorian, however, reveals the artificiality of her theatrical career and she is no longer able to act. This spells disaster by destroying Dorian's fascination with—and love for—her.

This chapter's cruelty comes from Dorian's response. Wilde shows just how shallow Dorian is by the speed with which his love for Sibyl evaporates. He treats her no better than the rest of the audience who know her only as a performer. That means he really doesn't know her either. She's merely a performer to him and he has no real love for her as a person. Here Wilde creates dramatic irony, in which the audience has an awareness that the characters do not, since this situation runs

parallel to how the world treats Dorian, loving him only for his beauty, not for his essence. In Dorian's case, however, the illusion remains unchallenged until the end of the novel.

The fantastical element that Wilde introduces here is, of course, at the dramatic heart of the novel: the portrait's ability to absorb Dorian's immoral actions and thus age in his place. This is the point where the novel shifts from being an intelligent but intellectual narrative to a kind of dark moral fantasy. That the painting reflects not just Dorian's aging, as his initial prayer might have suggested, but the ethical nature of his actions suggests the universe has a complex moral nature. Dorian's reaction at seeing the physical change in his portrait shows he is ill equipped to deal with the universe's absolute moral reality.

Chapter 8

Summary

Dorian sleeps in the next day and, as he has a late breakfast, studies the portrait again—trying to decide if he had imagined the changes. He's horrified by the idea that the portrait might really transform itself, but he is glad it showed him how badly he acted toward Sibyl. He eventually writes a letter begging Sibyl's forgiveness.

When Henry arrives, they talk about what Dorian will do now. When Dorian says he plans to marry Sibyl, Henry is confused. They talk, and Henry realizes Dorian doesn't know that Sibyl was found "lying dead on the floor of her dressing-room." It looks as if she killed herself. Henry urges Dorian not to get mixed up with the inquest into her death or the emotional upheaval surrounding it, and to accompany him to the opera for distraction. In a long speech Dorian expresses shock at Sibyl's death and remorse that he may be at fault. He wonders why he can't feel her death the way he should. This leads to Henry's reflecting on the nature of tragedy. He urges Dorian to let this become part of the past. He casts Sibyl's death as part of her identity as an actress. Just as the classic heroines she played had to die for the sake of their drama, so did Sibyl.

Dorian comes around to seeing what happened as a "marvelous experience." Henry promises Dorian will have many more, being as good-looking as he is. Dorian wonders what will happen if he ever loses his good looks, and Henry tells him then he'll have to fight for his victories. When Henry leaves, Dorian studies the painting again. He doesn't see any more changes. He thinks about Sibyl, and about what path his life should take. He concludes that his choice has already been made: pleasure. He thinks about praying for his strange relationship with the painting to end but decides otherwise, and he joins Henry at the opera.

Analysis

When Dorian's portrait transforms in response to how he treated Sibyl, the nature of the novel's universe changes. Chapter 8 provides a similar pivot, if a quieter one. Chapter 7 ended with Dorian showing the first signs of learning from the painting. On his own he had not been able to see the hatefulness of his actions toward Sibyl, but the visual evidence of cruelty depicted in his portrait gives a glimpse of how his actions may have changed him. He becomes remorseful and determines not to sin again.

However, this chapter shows Dorian's emotions leaning in the opposite direction—toward pleasure, even if sinful. Just as his earliest changes had come from talking with Henry, so does this one.

At other key moments in the novel, Dorian speaks with both Basil and Henry. This time he sees only Henry, who starts by being supportive and sympathetic. His cynical advice regarding the inquest into Sibyl's death supports the novel's theme of reputation versus character, as he tells Dorian, "There will have to be an inquest, of course, and you must not be mixed up in it. Things like that make a man fashionable in Paris. But in London people are so prejudiced. Here, one should never make one's *debut* with a scandal."

Henry soon transitions to a less conventional role and guides Dorian to see Sibyl's death aesthetically, as he does. This is, in many ways, horrific. Dorian, though, accepts the guidance, and fully embraces Henry's life path of pleasure.

Amid these moments of philosophy and shifting character, there are also details foreshadowing later events in the novel. After Henry invites Dorian to the opera, Dorian muses, "So I have murdered Sibyl Vane ... murdered her as surely as if I had cut her little throat with a knife." This romanticizes his actions. He didn't murder her. She killed herself.

Although he sees Sibyl's suicide as a murder by proxy, it does foreshadow an actual murder: Dorian will kill Basil a few

chapters later. Chapter 20 will see another murder by proxy—though this time a decidedly surreal one—as Dorian kills himself by stabbing his portrait.

Both of these later deaths reflect in some way on Dorian *the artistic creation*: Basil painted his portrait, and that portrait frees Dorian to indulge his pleasures freely. Sibyl's death, too, is that sort of *killing*. In his mind Dorian creates Sibyl as the artistic embodiment of the heroines she portrays and abandons (symbolically *kills*) her when the reality of her everyday self is revealed.

Chapter 9

Summary

The next morning Basil visits while Dorian is having breakfast. He's full of sympathy over Sibyl's death and doesn't believe what he was told the night before about Dorian going to the opera after Sibyl died. Dorian tells Basil he did go to the opera, and that Sibyl's death belongs to the past. Basil is stunned by this attitude and wishes for the Dorian he originally painted. Dorian tells him it is too late for that. Basil is again stunned to learn that Sibyl killed herself. Dorian responds with a long speech about the proper attitude one should take toward suffering: people should (as Henry taught him) become spectators in their own lives.

The conversation moves on. Dorian won't be involved in the inquest because Sibyl didn't know his real name. Basil wants to see his painting of Dorian, but Dorian begs him not to look. In fact he says that if Basil looks at the portrait Dorian will never speak to him again. Basil agrees not to look but says he wants to exhibit the painting. Dorian asks him not to. In response Basil asks if Dorian has noticed anything unusual about the painting. Dorian's reaction shows that he has noticed something (just not what Basil fears). Basil explains that, before this portrait, he'd sketched Dorian as various historic and mythical characters. When he painted Dorian as he really is, Basil believes he put much of his feelings about Dorian onto the canvas. He now is concerned that too much of his affection may be evident in the portrait. Basil ends up agreeing with Dorian that the portrait will not be exhibited. Dorian's pleased and can't imagine ever being influenced by someone else's personality the way Basil has admitted he was. However, he refuses to ever pose for Basil again, insisting they must now be just friends.

Analysis

In his preface to this novel, Wilde evaluates people who find "ugly meanings in beautiful things" and those who find "beautiful meanings in beautiful things." Chapter 9 fills in the rest of that spectrum, for in this chapter Dorian shows himself to be someone who can refuse to see the meaning and ugliness in an ugly thing (Sibyl's death). Basil is rightly horrified at Dorian's response, which is cold and distant to the point of being inhuman. When Basil objects, Dorian explains further, trotting out a theory of self-mastery that is a distorted version of a spiritual perspective. Where a serene soul or enlightened person might be able to let a pain go more quickly than most people through lack of egoistic attachment, Dorian is severing his attachment from the pain of Sibyl's death with a knife of pure ego.

When Basil asks Dorian to pose for him again, Dorian's supposed self-mastery is exposed as false. He overreacts wildly and, when Basil asks to see the earlier portrait, he becomes quite terrified. As Basil continues talking about the portrait Dorian turns white with extreme anger. These are not the responses of a man who has mastered himself or one who can put pain behind him.

The conversation between Basil and Dorian plays masterfully with the plot element of suspense. Wilde teases the reader by having Basil ask Dorian if he's noticed anything "curious" about the painting. This ends up being a red herring, as what Basil's concerned about Dorian noticing might be embarrassing (Basil's attitude toward Dorian), but it is not the metaphysical strangeness of the actual painting, transforming as it does with Dorian's every sin. Their conversation shifts from a potential exposure of Dorian's inner nature to an exposure of Basil's inner nature. In that it shows the period's anxiety regarding homosexual attraction.

Chapter 10

Summary

Basil leaves. Dorian tells his servant Victor to send in Mrs. Leaf, the housekeeper, and then to go fetch the frame maker, Mr. Hubbard. When Mrs. Leaf arrives, Dorian gets the key to the unused schoolroom from her. She objects because it is so dirty, but he insists. Once she leaves, Dorian wraps the painting in 17th-century Venetian satin. When the frame maker arrives, Dorian has the man and his assistant carry the painting to the schoolroom.

After the workmen leave, Dorian has tea and, as he does, he considers getting rid of his servant since the man might notice the missing painting. He then opens a note from Henry. Henry sent the evening paper over: it includes the results of the inquest into Sibyl's death. After a shudder over the ugliness of it all, Dorian reads the "yellow book," a volume Henry sent over. A stylized and plotless novel, it is a psychological study of a man who indulges in sensual experiences. Dorian is hypnotized, reading for hours. It's nearly nine before he meets Henry at the club for dinner.

Analysis

It is possible that the unused schoolroom is the only empty room in Dorian's house. However, for purposes of understanding this novel, it is more useful to see the room symbolically. Dorian has shown himself completely unwilling to learn from experience. His own psychic schoolroom is unused, dusty, and locked away. It makes perfect symbolic sense to store the painting there, along with all the lessons from childhood he never reviews. This symbol should also nudge readers to realize how little they know of Dorian's actual past. The only details Wilde provides are through Lord George Fermor, Henry's uncle, and they are details that make Dorian a more romantic figure, not less. The impulsiveness with which Dorian gave his heart to Sibyl may be seen as an inheritance from his mother: Margaret Devereux ran off with and married a penniless soldier—a romantic and impulsive gesture.

Dorian's decision to hide the painting supports two of the novel's themes: appearance versus reality and art versus life. This indicates an embrace of the painting's power to hide his sin and aging and a refusal to use it to guide his character. If he can't see the lessons it gives him, he can't learn from the painting. Hiding the portrait away shows that for Dorian his soul belongs with his unused past.

A distinct turning point in the chapter is Henry's gift of a "yellow book." Dorian puts away his school books, and he takes up this yellow book. Wilde never tells readers exactly what this book is, or if it is a specific book, but it is a work of French literature. Some scholars have stopped there, but others take the argument further, arguing it is the 1884 novel *À Rebours* (*Against Nature* or *Against the Grain*) by Joris-Karl Huysmans. This novel focused on the last member of an aristocratic house doing increasingly perverted things just to avoid boredom.

Wilde read this novel, and it influenced his writing of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. It then has a profound influence on Dorian in turn and foreshadows his own hedonistic life of pleasure seeking.

Chapter 11

Summary

This strange book influences Dorian for years. He buys multiple copies and binds them in different colors to match his moods. Years pass. Rumors circulate about Dorian, but since Dorian keeps his beauty people have trouble believing anything negative about him. He regularly takes a mirror to the schoolroom and compares his reflection to the face in his portrait. Periodically he hosts dinners for which he hires the greatest musicians to play. Dorian comes to treat life itself as an art form and lives a life of the senses. For the sake of pleasure, Dorian pursues a number of interests: Catholicism, Darwinism, perfumes, music, jewels, embroideries, ecclesiastical vestments, and other objects. He uses all of these to keep a profound fear at bay—the fear of his indulgences transforming the face in his portrait. Dorian stops traveling for fear someone might see the portrait while he is gone. Rationally, he knows there is nothing to be afraid of: even if someone saw the painting it wouldn't prove anything. At other times he is proud of the very degradation he feared, seeing it as a mark of individualism.

Over time Dorian's reputation becomes very dark. People whisper about him. One club denies him membership. There are rumors about Dorian's involvement in street brawls and a range of crimes. Women who had worshipped him now grow pale when he enters the room. This change in his reputation

doesn't bother Dorian, and the rumors that hurt his reputation with some raise it with others. During this time Dorian wanders through picture-gallery of his country house and through literature, looking for literal and spiritual ancestors. Throughout all this, Dorian continues to read and reread the strange novel Henry had given him, concluding that the book has "poisoned" him.

Analysis

The chapter serves several functions. First, it documents Henry's inconsistency. Although he claims all influence is bad, he works in a focused fashion to influence Dorian. In this case he sends him a "yellow book" that is so well targeted it becomes a near obsession for Dorian. Second, the chapter documents Dorian's rather odd nature as far as influence. On one hand he seems to reject social conventions, living life as he chooses. This can be seen in his conspicuous consumption and display. On the other hand he is so influenced by this mysterious little book he has multiple copies of it.

Third, this chapter illustrates Dorian's complex relationship with his portrait. If the "yellow book" inspires him at all times, Basil's painting haunts him at all times. Any time he indulges himself with jewels or perfumes, he does so not just for his own pleasure but to keep his terror of the portrait at bay. At the same time, through his indulgences he is creating the very thing he fears (transformations in the portrait). In this way Wilde provides here a perfect illustration of addiction or obsession. Dorian is creating the very face he fears. Wilde also shows the reader how very different interests can serve the same function. On the surface there is little or no relationship among Catholicism, Darwinism, and, say, jewels. They seem like three distinct obsessions. By clustering them together Wilde shows how they all serve as escapes, and how all allow Dorian to indulge himself.

Wilde makes it clear that Dorian can act this way only because of his class. Only the wealthy can afford the sort of systematic self-indulgence shown here.

The chapter develops the theme of character versus reputation as well. For all that Dorian's magic painting keeps the results of his excesses from showing up on his face, he can't keep people from talking about him.

Chapter 12

Summary

On the foggy evening before Dorian's 38th birthday, he passes Basil on the street. Dorian hopes Basil hasn't seen him, but he has. They talk. Basil is about to go to Paris for six months to paint. The friends go to Dorian's house to talk. A blazing fire in the library fireplace makes the room cheerful and welcoming. Once the two men are settled, Basil introduces the serious topic he wants to talk about: people are saying terrible things about Dorian. Dorian dismisses Basil's concern, but Basil explains at length how important reputation is and raises specific questions. Dorian answers some of the questions but mostly dismisses them. Basil carries on, however, with more specific—and damning—stories about Dorian.

After relating these dire stories that paint Dorian as some sort of fiend, Basis wonders aloud if he truly knows Dorian and declares that to know his friend he would have "to see [his] soul" and concludes, "But only God can do that."

Dorian laughs, but agrees. He says Basil can see his soul. Basil is horrified, and says such thoughts are blasphemy. Dorian insists, though. He says he keeps a daily diary of his soul, and he takes a lamp to lead Basil upstairs to see it.

Analysis

This chapter blends some fairly casual plotting with some essential thematic developments. Given the social circles in which Henry, Basil, and Dorian move, it is not impossible for Basil and Dorian to run into each other on the street. However, it is less likely for them to do it just before Basil conveniently leaves the country, or, given how dense fog can be in London, on a foggy night. That fog is literal, but it is also symbolic, indicating how both men think they are in control of their lives but are in reality moving through a hazy world where neither sees as clearly as he thinks he does.

Dorian displays this lack of clarity when he rejects the issue of his reputation. Even someone with a magic portrait can be damaged by the persistent circulation of nasty stories, particularly when those stories are true. Basil displays this lack of clarity when he brings up the idea of seeing Dorian's soul.

Though the concept that artists can see the soul is not uncommon in romanticism, few people think they can do it on demand. Both men seem to claim more control over their lives than they actually have.

Chapter 13

Summary

Basil follows Dorian upstairs to the room where he has stored Basil's painting of him. He tears back the curtain to reveal the portrait, and Basil screams in horror. He studies the painting and sees the remains of Dorian's beauty in this painting of decay and corruption. Basil also recognizes his own brushwork and, finally, sees his signature. Dorian watches him process the sight.

Basil eventually asks Dorian what this means. Dorian reminds Basil of the prayer he made when the portrait was completed—that the painting would age but Dorian himself would not grow older. Basil remembers but can't believe this is what happened. They argue about the painting and what must have happened. Basil eventually acknowledges the reality his eyes show him and is now horrified about what this says about Dorian's character. He begins to cry. They continue to talk through Basil's tears, and Basil tells Dorian how terrible his sins must be for the painting to look the way it does. Overcome with hatred, Dorian picks up a knife and stabs Basil to death. After the murder, the emotion leaves Dorian. He calmly covers up the crime. He leaves the house, and then rings the doorbell. When his drowsy servant opens the door, Dorian says he had forgotten his key. With this ruse he has established an alibi for himself since the man will be able to testify when Dorian came home. Once that is done, he looks up the address for Alan Campbell, a former friend.

Analysis

Wilde's philosophical goals are very contemporary, like Dorian's pleasures. However, this scene calls on the power of an older tradition: Gothic literature. The room Basil enters might as well be something from some haunted castle given its desolation, decay, and scuttling mice. Just as Gothic novels often contained hideous secrets, so does this mysterious locked room. At the same time though, this is a unique and specialized Gothic story. Most people would not realize the meaning of the secret that's revealed here, and it is essentially unheard of in the gothic tradition for someone to have to reveal a secret to the person who created it, as Dorian does to Basil.

This chapter supports the themes of appearance versus reality and art versus life and employs the symbol of Dorian's portrait. It also marks a transition in Dorian's character development. This is the first time since the portrait began to change that Dorian has let anyone else see the painting. Until this point Wilde was willing to essentially tease readers with the suggestion of how much Basil's painting had transformed. When Dorian reveals it, it is so horrific Basil screams at the sight. This communicates that Dorian's beautiful appearance is a mere façade for the degraded reality that the portrait reveals underneath. Although Dorian has been living as if no one else's opinion matters, it is clear Basil's reaction matters a lot. Dorian adamantly does not want to face his true nature—so much so that he kills Basil.

Chapter 14

Summary

Dorian sleeps so peacefully his servant has trouble waking him the next morning. The events of the previous night slowly seep back into his brain, along with his loathing for Basil. He decides that if he thinks about the event too much he'll go crazy, so Dorian dresses carefully, reads his mail, and sends a message to Alan Campbell. While he waits for a response, Dorian reads poetry by the French poet Gautier. He loses himself in the beauty of the poems and in the memories of travel they evoke. Eventually though, Dorian begins to worry that Campbell is out of town. This leads to his reflecting on Campbell and their relationship. Campbell was a scientist with a strong interest in music who had gotten involved in the arts and society scene with Dorian. For 18 months they were inseparable. Then they stopped associating with each other, and no outsider knew why. Campbell became morose afterward, lost interest in music, and took a greater interest in biology.

Dorian becomes agitated waiting for Campbell to arrive and, when Campbell appears, it's obvious he doesn't want to be there. He views Dorian with contempt. When Dorian tells him

he needs his help to get rid of a dead body, Campbell refuses. Dorian tells him it was suicide, and Campbell assumes Dorian drove the dead man to it. Dorian switches his story and admits it was murder. Campbell is horrified but still refuses to help. At last Dorian writes something on a piece of paper and shows it to Campbell. When Campbell reads it, he becomes physically ill. Dorian follows this by saying he's written a letter that he will mail if Campbell doesn't help him. The implication is that the letter contains information that will ruin Campbell. Eventually, Campbell agrees to dispose of the body. He says he'll need to go fetch some supplies. Dorian refuses to let him leave and has Campbell write a list of supplies that his servant will fetch. After the servant delivers the supplies Dorian then sends him on an additional errand to keep him out of the house while Campbell is doing his "experiment" (getting rid of the body). When Dorian and Campbell go upstairs, Dorian says he can't go in the room with the dead body again. Campbell goes in alone and works for hours to get rid of it. Eventually he's done. As he leaves he asks that the two of them never see each other again.

Analysis

It is telling that Dorian takes refuge in reading Gautier while he's waiting for Campbell. Théophile Gautier was an influential 19th-century French writer. Much of his work is considered romantic, but he was also quite influential in the symbolist and decadent movements. He had been a painter and was an influential critic in several fields. Like Wilde, Gautier rejected the idea that art should teach moral lessons and the artist should focus on perfecting the form. Also like Wilde, he adapted supernatural concepts for his artistic purposes.

While there is no overt homosexual activity in the novel, this is one of the chapters where it is very strongly implied. There are other activities that two men might have done together, like putting on a theater production, but few if any legitimate activities that would let Dorian blackmail Campbell into helping him afterward. There are also few other things Wilde would have felt compelled to keep secret or only imply to the reader, as he does here by having Dorian pass a note to Campbell and by not allowing the reader to see what is written on it.

Chapter 15

Summary

The evening following the body's disposal, Dorian attends a party hosted by Lady Narborough. He's nervous but appears calm and graceful. Dorian finds the party boring until Henry arrives. Dorian doesn't eat anything at dinner, and Henry wonders what is wrong with him. Lady Narborough speculates he must be in love. Dorian denies it, saying he hasn't been in love since Madame de Ferrol left town, and that's been a whole week. This leads to gossip about Madame de Ferrol. At one point Henry offers one of his witticisms, about the most beautiful wives belonging to "the criminal classes." Lady Narborough comments on how everyone says Henry is wicked, and Henry follows with a comment about it being "monstrous" how people repeat things that are completely true about others. Dorian laughs about Henry's character.

A bit later Dorian wishes it were the end of the world because he's exhausted and disappointed by life. This leads to Lady Narborough claiming Dorian should marry. Henry agrees but begins a cynical but amusing discourse on marriage. After the conversation shifts, Henry and Dorian get a chance to talk more privately. Henry asks what Dorian did after leaving Henry's house the night before. When Dorian answers, he fumbles. He starts to say he'd gone to his club, then changes his story and said he had gone for a walk. Flustered, he suggests Henry can contact his servant for evidence if he needs to. Henry waves the offer away, wondering why he would care so much.

Dorian makes excuses for his mood and leaves. As he goes home, his earlier terror returns. Once he's home, he takes Basil's coat and suitcase from where he hid them and throws them in the fire. After they burn, Dorian is overcome by a powerful longing. He goes to an ornate cabinet and takes out an Asian lacquered box, which he opens. After staring fixedly at the opium paste it contains, he returns the box to the cabinet drawer, leaves his home, and calls a hansom cab. When he gives the driver the address, the man at first refuses to go, saying it is too far. Dorian pays him generously, promising more after, and the man agrees to take him.

Analysis

Dorian slept so well immediately after killing Basil that readers might think he lacks a conscience or is completely at ease with his actions. This chapter shows how his actions affect him and how he's beset by anxiety and fear. What he has done gnaws at him so much that first he cannot eat and then is visibly upset. He follows this by offering Henry clumsy alibis his friend had not asked for, and then finally, by putting a lot of time and effort into getting drugs.

The discussion between Lady Narborough and Henry offers a good example of how people see Dorian and the dramatic irony between his appearance and reality. Because he is so beautiful, people associate him with love. They assume any emotional upset on Dorian's part comes from romance. In fact his uneasiness comes from killing someone (Basil). This gives Henry's comments about the wives of the criminal classes a particular edge: he thinks he's talking about other people, but he's talking about his beloved Dorian. Like many events in the novel, this underscores the theme of the tension between appearance and reality.

Finally, though this is not a major theme for the novel it is worth noting here how many of the key plot points depend on wealth. Surely any poor person under stress would want to be able to escape. Few, however, have the money to hire a cab late at night to ride across London in search of opium. Fewer store drugs in an elaborate ebony "Florentine cabinet." As much space as Wilde gives Henry to articulate a philosophy of aestheticism, Wilde continually complicates and undercuts this philosophy in a number of ways. In this chapter he undercuts it by showing that living the kind of life Henry champions costs a lot of money. This path is an option for only the wealthy.

Chapter 16

Summary

As Dorian rides to the opium den, he thinks back on what Henry told him the first day they met, about curing the soul by means of the senses and the senses by means of the soul. This seems right and indicates that opium can solve his problem and calm his nerves. The ride to the opium den seems to take forever, and Dorian finds himself repeating Henry's line about soul and senses over and over. Eventually they arrive. The opium den is dirty and decrepit, and the people there are desperate. Dorian recognizes one man, Adrian Singleton. Dorian invites him to the bar for a drink. Women approach them. Dorian pays them to leave the two men in peace.

After they talk, Dorian leaves. The woman who had taken Dorian's money talks to him as he leaves, calling him the "devil's bargain" and "Prince Charming." This wakes a drowsing sailor, who follows Dorian. Dorian is walking through the rain, thinking about how he was not responsible for Adrian's ruined life despite Basil's accusation. Suddenly a man grabs him from behind and pulls a gun on him. It's James Vane. James blames Dorian for his sister Sibyl's death, and years ago he swore he'd kill Dorian if he ever got the chance. However, he didn't know Dorian's name and had no way of finding him until he heard the woman in the opium den call him "Prince Charming." James is about to kill Dorian when Dorian asks how long it has been since his sister was killed. When James says it has been 18 years, Dorian asks him to look at his face. James does and immediately sees that Dorian looks barely 20 years old. He apologizes, and Dorian lectures him about how wrong he was to take vengeance into his own hands.

Once Dorian leaves, James stands on the street, horrified over what he had almost done. The same woman from the opium den approaches James and asks why he didn't kill Dorian. James says it was a mistake: it was impossible for Dorian to be the person he was looking for because he was too young. The woman laughs bitterly and says Prince Charming ruined her 18 years ago. James doesn't believe it, but the woman swears it is true.

Analysis

It has been many years since Henry woke Dorian to his own beauty and spouted his witticism about curing the senses and the soul. For Dorian to remember that quip now—in a time of crisis and after he's just killed someone—shows how completely Henry has influenced Dorian. It also shows the shallowness of Henry's witticism, or at least Dorian's application of the quip. The idea that using drugs is a way to heal your soul, or the best thing to do after you've killed someone, is short sighted indeed. Wilde underscores this by the scene he reveals at the opium den. This is a disgusting place, full of people who have wasted their lives or are essentially dead.

This chapter also shows the complexity of Wilde's novel, however. Although his point about drug use and degradation seems completely conventional, this chapter also presents—and then thwarts—a classic scene of karmic justice. In a series of plot twists that seem more at home in myths or fairy tales, James Vane suddenly appears to confront the man who ruined his sister. This is so unlikely as to be impossible. Even if James is now a drunk or an opium addict, there were multiple opium dens and bars in London at this time. For James to be in the same one Dorian visits, at the same time, would not be credible in a realistic novel. The coincidence is too great. However, Wilde pulls this off through his control of the narrative and specifically through the fantastic world he evokes. This is a world in which paintings age and people don't; in such a world "Prince Charming" may logically encounter his enemy. But Wilde doesn't stop his complications there. For Dorian to escape justice through the magic of his ageless face negates any sense that vice is always punished in the end.

Despite Dorian's escape, this chapter does indicate that the end of the novel, and his campaign of vice, is near. More people are learning of his secret, and there's a sense that the situation is unraveling.

Chapter 17

Summary

A week later Dorian is sitting in the conservatory (greenhouse) of his country estate and chatting with the Duchess of Monmouth. She is one of a dozen guests, and more are expected to join the group the next day. When Henry joins the conversation, he and the duchess exchange witty flirtation, touching on beauty and ugliness, among other topics. The duchess suggests that Henry thinks of ugliness as one of the seven deadly sins, and he replies it is one of the "seven deadly virtues." The conversation touches on many subjects, eventually turning to Dorian. Henry mentions Dorian used to be called "Prince Charming." Dorian protests being reminded of the title. They move on quickly to discuss relationships. Dorian leaves, going to the far end of the conservatory to get the duchess some flowers. On their own, she and Henry return to their fast-paced conversation. Henry chides the duchess about how she is flirting with Dorian and lets her know she has a rival. They are talking about the war between the sexes when they hear a groan from the other end of the room. Dorian has fainted because he's seen James Vane peering in through the window.

Analysis

In this chapter Wilde supports the theme of pleasure versus virtue. As part of his spirited exchange with the duchess, Henry says, "Romance lives by repetition, and repetition converts an appetite into an art ... Each time that one loves is the only time one has ever loved ... We can have in life but one great experience at best, and the secret of life is to reproduce that experience as often as possible."

This makes all of life into a process of consciously managing experiences. Following the path Henry describes will lead to pleasant, but ultimately sterile, repetition.

Henry's statement applies directly to Dorian's life, and Dorian's life to it. When he loved Sibyl, Dorian was young, naive, even foolish. But his love for her was unlike any other love in his life. In the time since, he's clearly been involved with many partners, but never with the intensity that he felt for Sibyl. And Henry's path is so self-centered it becomes extreme narcissism. In fact Henry makes it sound as though the identity of the other person doesn't matter at all. It is one's own passion that defines romance. If that's the case, any partner is as good as any other. All dreams of *soul mates*, or even of mutual respect, dissolve. Only the lover's experience remains. As Dorian himself testifies, this philosophy results in pleasure but not happiness. And the world it creates is ultimately vulnerable: the sight of one face from the past that's associated with genuine wrongdoing (James Vane) can make Dorian pass out.

Two other aspects of this chapter deserve notice. The first is that Dorian says he always agrees with Henry and that Henry is never wrong. This means that although Dorian appears to be living a life of his own creation, he is in some sense dancing to Henry's tune. For all of his experiences, he's never come up with a new idea of his own. All is pleasure.

The second noteworthy aspect of the chapter is that Dorian's "Prince Charming" title returns again to haunt him. Like the return of James Vane in the previous chapter and at the end of this one, this signals his magical deal with time is coming to an end. Dorian can appear to live outside of time, but he can't escape it. His past is catching up with him.

Chapter 18

Summary

The next day, despite his guests, Dorian stays in the house all day, terrified. He keeps thinking about seeing James Vane's face. He thinks about how Vane threatens him, and about all of his crimes (killing Basil chief among them). Henry joins him at six o'clock and finds him crying. Dorian stays indoors for three days before going for a walk with the duchess and then joins a group who will be shooting in the estate's park.

Dorian joins the duchess's brother, Sir Geoffrey Clouston. The two men walk together. Dorian is enjoying nature, and when they see a hare he begs Clouston not to shoot it. The man laughs at him and fires at the animal. The two men hear the sound of an injured hare—and the screams of an injured man. Clouston criticizes the gamekeeper for letting one of the beaters get in the way and spoil their fun. A few minutes later Henry finds Dorian and tells him the shooting has been cancelled for the day, and the man who was shot has died. Dorian calls this a "bad omen," but Henry laughs at him. The talk moves on to related topics, like women and flirting, with Dorian repeatedly complaining about how bad his life is but not giving Henry any details. The duchess joins them, but after a brief exchange Dorian excuses himself to go rest.

Alone in his room, Dorian is once again terrified and decides he leave his estate and go to London. He sees the beater's death as a sign of his own impending doom. The gamekeeper comes to see Dorian about the dead man, and Dorian offers to give money so the man's family won't suffer. However, the gamekeeper reports that the dead man isn't one of the beaters and looks like a sailor. Dorian is startled and insists on seeing the body. It is James Vane. Dorian feels relief and is sure he's now safe.

Analysis

This chapter underscores some key aspects of Dorian's character and provides several highly dramatic plot twists. Referencing Dorian's character, Wilde shows readers that Dorian is falling apart. This is no longer a man in complete control of his life. This is a man who cowers in his room, weeping. This is another of Wilde's complex renderings of the aesthetic movement. In theory Dorian should have been able to convert his encounter with James Vane into just another experience, akin to dabbling in gem collecting or Roman Catholicism. In reality, events like having one's life threatened overwhelm this philosophy. Wilde casts a second spotlight on Dorian's character when he sees the death of the beater as a bad omen. This is incredibly self-centered. When an individual views someone else's death as a sign that there might be trouble in one's own life, it is a signal of narcissism: everyone else is seen as a bit player or special effect. Here again though, Wilde illustrates the role of class in Dorian's world. When Sir Geoffrey shoots the beater, he isn't overcome with shame or horror at his actions. Instead he says, "What an ass ... " and complains about the man spoiling his shooting. Dorian's failings, then, are less his own than the failings of the rich and noble enlarged for easy viewing.

This is another instance in which the novel's plotting seems like something from a myth or fairy tale rather than a contemporary or realistic novel. This is the first time Dorian has been out of the house in days. There's an entire woods James can hide in. Dorian is extremely self-centered as a rule, and over the past few days he's been particularly focused on his own life and survival. So far Dorian's connection to nature has included smelling flowers, but he hasn't paid much attention to animals. (No cats or dogs are mentioned.) In responding to the hare's grace, Dorian reaches beyond his ego for one rare time in the book. He asks Clouston not to shoot the hare, but he does—and kills James too. It is as if Wilde is saying the path of compassion and empathy is not for Dorian. Instead, fortunate accidents happen to preserve his life and freedom.

Chapter 19

Summary

Not long after, Henry and Dorian are talking. Dorian tells Henry he's changing his life: he's going to be good. In fact he's already started. He was making romantic overtures to a woman and decided to "leave her as flower-like as I had found her." Henry begs him not to change and dismisses the idea that this woman will be content after experiencing someone like Dorian. Dorian complains about Henry mocking everything he says. He changes the subject, asking about the gossip. Though he mentions his own divorce and Alan Campbell's suicide in

passing, Henry tells him everyone is talking about Basil's disappearance. They talk about what might have happened, and Dorian asks if Henry ever considered that Basil might have been killed. Henry literally yawns in response as he dismisses the idea because of Basil's dullness. Dorian then asks what Henry would do if Dorian admitted he'd killed Basil. Henry dismisses this idea too: it is vulgar and Dorian doesn't have it in him to commit violent crime.

The conversation moves on. Henry notes that Basil's painting hadn't been as strong in the last 10 years as it had before and asks Dorian if that's why Dorian and Basil hadn't been as close. He asks what Dorian did with Basil's portrait of him, and Dorian claims he doesn't remember. They are discussing art when Henry asks Dorian an unexpected question, "What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose ... his own soul?" Dorian's startled, and inquires why Henry asks this; Henry says he heard a street preacher say it. Dorian then responds seriously, saying that each human has a soul and they can damage or improve it. Henry rejects this as well, precisely because Dorian is sure about it.

From here Henry shifts to delivering long statements on how radically he has changed since the two men met but Dorian hasn't. Dorian is, Henry tells him, perfect. Life worships him and always has. Dorian agrees his life has been wonderful but says Henry doesn't know everything about him, and things will change. Henry rejects this idea again, calling for Dorian to come to the club to meet a young man who has asked for an introduction. When he compliments Dorian's piano playing, saying it is the best it has ever been, Dorian says it is because he has already changed. After further discussion, Dorian agrees to meet Henry at the club at 11.

Analysis

This chapter is extremely complicated for one so short. Throughout the section Henry argues for the pleasure side of the pleasure versus virtue theme. As is always the case in the novel, Henry is witty, striking, and informed. It would be easy to believe him, and pleasant to do so. However, Henry's words ultimately ring false; in light of the reader's knowledge of Dorian in contrast with the characters' understandings, they provide an example of dramatic irony. The chapter provides support for the theme of art versus life when Henry says, "Art has no influence upon action. It annihilates the desire to act. It is superbly sterile." Art may be sterile—Dorian produces nothing, does not marry, and has no children—but it is sterile precisely because it has such a profound influence upon action. Basil's painting of Dorian functions as an externalized and omniscient conscience. At the very least art immediately reveals what people have done. At the most it trumps reality, at least temporarily, changing the way biology and physics work around Dorian.

In their own way Henry's arguments are as independent of time and traditional physical reality as Basil's picture of Dorian. He was there for Dorian's interaction with Sibyl Vane. He knows the theater played a major role in their love and that Sibyl's bad acting played an active role in breaking the spell she had on Dorian. He even left the performance because he could not stand the bad art he was experiencing. Therefore, Henry knows art has an active influence on emotion, psychology, and his own action. To believe otherwise is to engage in willful fantasy.

Once again Henry proves himself not much of a friend to Dorian, as he punctures his desire to change. He also shows the distance between them, and perhaps his own shallowness, by mentioning his divorce so briefly. It matters only as a marker for how public attention is spent. This shallowness is underscored by his rejection of Dorian's question about the possibility that he killed Basil. Henry says, "All crime is vulgar, just as all vulgarity is crime." What he's missing is that Dorian is extremely vulgar. Dorian is also as shallow as Henry. When Henry mentions Allan Campbell's suicide, Dorian does not even react, even though he'd known the man intimately and left him broken. He just looks pretty. Wilde provides a damning statement on the aesthetic movement, delivered in the most aesthetically pleasing fashion possible.

Chapter 20

Summary

As Dorian walks home, enjoying the pleasant evening, he hears people talking about him. This leads him to think about how he used to enjoy being talked about, and how the girl he had been romancing had an innocence he'd lost. Once he gets home, he settles in the library and continues thinking—focusing now on what Henry said about how Dorian couldn't change. He longs for his lost innocence. As he thinks over various memories, he

gets angry and breaks a mirror Henry had given him years ago.

Dorian thinks of all the people whose lives he has ruined or damaged. He resolves to put the past behind him and to change. When he thinks of Hetty Merton, the girl he intentionally did not spoil, he wonders if his magic portrait still looks as terrible as it used to. He goes to look at it and finds it is as macabre as ever. It might even be more horrible, because, in addition to all the past sins, Dorian can now see hypocrisy in the portrait's face. He wonders if Basil's murder will haunt him his whole life. The painting is, Dorian decides, the last piece of evidence, and so he must destroy it. He looks around and sees the knife he used to stab Basil. He plunges the blade into the painting. There is a terrible cry and a crash. His servants hear the sounds, as do people on the street outside. Entering the locked room by way of the window, they find the beautiful portrait of Dorian as a young man hanging on the wall. Below the painting lies an ugly and withered old man, a knife plunged into his heart.

Analysis

Chapter 20 brings the entire surreal tale to a close. Wilde had been wrapping up the various loose plot threads in the previous chapters. In this one he brings the various themes to a full resolution. If there is an imbalance between appearance and reality, this chapter says, it is temporary.

Reality will always break through to win in the end. The clash between art and life is more complicated. Dorian's actual sins do catch up with him in the end. However, the magical powers the portrait gave him are a major factor allowing him to sin the way he did. If Dorian looked the way his portrait does at the end of the novel, men and women would not have fallen in love with him, people would have believed all of the dark rumors about him, and so on. Art enabled his loathsome life, even as it hid it.

Throughout the novel Dorian had enjoyed using a mirror to inspect his face for (absent) signs of change. When he did not find any, he was reassured. In this chapter, though, he breaks a mirror, symbolizing the end of his extended self-contemplation. As soon as he is no longer content to look at his own beauty, his death is sure to follow quickly, as indeed it does.

This last chapter adds another layer to Wilde's complex consideration of art in this novel. Dorian has repeatedly shown himself to be extremely shallow and self-centered. He misses the impact of many of his actions. In Basil's portrait, though, he can immediately see a single line of hypocrisy after his decision to not seduce Hetty Merton. This indicates that great art can lift even the shallowest of people to new insight. Dorian's reaction, though, damns him further. In his preface to the novel, Wilde wrote, "Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming. This is a fault." This, in the end, describes Dorian.

At last Wilde leaves it to the reader to determine whether Dorian in fact stuck the dagger into his own heart, or, whether, in slashing his portrait, he rendered a magical and mortal wound.

“ Quotes

"All art is quite useless."

— Oscar Wilde, Preface

This final line in Oscar Wilde's preface to his novel concludes a brief (roughly one page) but dense treatise on the nature of art, beauty, and criticism.

Wilde does not say he is commenting on *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and indeed, he is careful to speak broadly. He intentionally discusses art as such, beauty in general, and criticism as a practice, rather than tying his comments to this novel in particular. Nevertheless, the fact that he chose to include these points before readers begin the narrative cannot be ignored. In tone, style, and general reasoning this preface is closest to the voice of Lord Henry Wotton, the cultured and cynical nobleman who awakens Dorian to the awareness of his own beauty in Chapter 2. However, it would have been easy enough to put these words in Henry's mouth. They would fit in any number of places in the narrative. Since Wilde did not do this, the reader must therefore apply them to the novel as a whole, including the character of Henry. Do not, this line says, look for meaning or influence from the novel. Instead, as an earlier section of the preface suggests, look for beauty.

"Because, without intending it, I

have put into it some expression of all this curious artistic idolatry, of which, of course, I have never cared to speak to him."

— Basil Hallward, Chapter 1

Dorian Gray does not appear in Chapter 1. Instead Chapter 1 is made up of the conversation between two old friends: Basil Hallward and Lord Henry Wotton. Henry has come to visit Basil while he paints, and the two men talk about Basil's current work, and, specifically, about Dorian Gray, who is the subject of Basil's painting.

This line comes near the end of Basil's explanation about why he won't ever display the painting of Dorian. It aligns with aspects of Wilde's preface. Structurally, it establishes several things for the novel. First it signals there is something special about the painting. Second it signals the relationship between Basil and Dorian is more than that of artist and sitter. This "idolatry" is one of many examples of the barely contained homoeroticism in the novel. And third it indicates how Romantic Wilde is in some ways, for here Basil indicates a creative force working through him.

"There is no such thing as a good influence, Mr. Gray. All influence is immoral—immoral from the scientific point of view."

— Lord Henry Wotton, Chapter 2

Lord Henry Wotton says this to Dorian Gray during their extended first meeting at Basil Hallward's studio. It reveals some of Henry's quite complex attitudes toward life, part of which involves treating one's own life as a work of art and approaching it objectively and aesthetically.

However, this statement is more than just a reflection of personality. It is at once profound and paradoxical. It is profound because it rises far above common morality. It is one of the lines marking this novel as philosophical. Rebelling against common behavior is common enough. All adolescents do that, at least for a while. It is much subtler to claim that all influence—of any sort—is wrong. The result is a severe form of individualism, in which all individuals are responsible for themselves. It destroys all social responsibility, and even institutions like family, for parents must influence their children.

The paradox comes from the fact that Henry influences Dorian on a fundamental level. Henry awakens Dorian to the awareness of his own beauty and to how fast life passes. Henry also continually postures and shares his philosophy with others, which shows he's continually seeking influence.

"Nothing can cure the soul but the senses, just as nothing can cure the senses but the soul."

— Lord Henry Wotton, Chapter 2

Said to Dorian Gray, this philosophical observation suggests a kind of balance to life, a yin-yang relationship between distinct parts of a human. However, few people of any period would suggest such an original relationship as this. Few have suggested there is a spiritual function to sensory indulgence, as Henry does here, or that one's soul should need curing.

Henry's skill at turning a phrase also reflects on Wilde's tendency to generate witticisms or epigrams. The line has both value and danger. The value is that this line is beautiful in itself and easy to remember. The danger is the line seems complete, and it is easy for the reader to forget, as Dorian does, that this leaves things out, like the rational mind or character.

Dorian remembers this line decades later, as he's headed to the opium den in Chapter 16.

"I am jealous of the portrait you have painted of me ... Every moment that passes takes something from me and gives

something to it. Oh, if it were only the other way! If the picture could change, and I could be always what I am now!"

— Dorian Gray, Chapter 2

Part of a larger emotional outburst to Lord Henry Wotton and Basil Hallward, Dorian's flood of words comes after Henry has awakened Dorian to the power and intensity of his own beauty, which is also when Dorian becomes aware of how short life is and how soon his youthful beauty will fade.

This intense prayer is much more straightforward than most of Henry's speeches in the novel, and this indicates how much simpler and straightforward Dorian's character is than his older friend (at this time). This prayer sets everything in motion. It is like a wish made in a fairy tale and establishes the relationship between Dorian and the painting.

This prayer serves as a prediction of how the novel ends, when the beautiful painting of young Dorian seems to mock the aged, dead Dorian.

"Nowadays people know the price of everything, and the value of nothing."

— Lord Henry Wotton, Chapter 4

This line is one of Wilde's famous epigrams. It appears in this novel when Lord Henry Wotton is talking to Dorian Gray, but it often appears free from its context, a kind of generalized cynical observation about value.

In context the meaning is more complex. Henry isn't home, and his wife, referred to as Lady Henry, is speaking to Dorian. She's quite nervous, and it seems to be because of Henry's relationship with Dorian. When Henry does come home, he says he just spent hours haggling over the price of a brocade. Since he has money, Henry is choosing to do this bargaining rather than spend time with his wife or friend. In context it is clearly Henry who knows the price of things but not the value.

"How horrid you are! She is all the great heroines of the world in one. She is more than an individual."

— Dorian Gray, Chapter 4

Dorian Gray says this to Lord Henry Wotton when he (Dorian) is gushing about how wonderful Sibyl Vane is. His comments about her are at once heartbreakingly naive and dangerously shallow. He has just said that Sibyl is never herself: she is always playing a role. Dorian's pronouncement to Henry shows how wonderful this is in his mind. Sibyl is larger than life, and more than one person.

In the end, however, a relationship must be between two people, each of whom is precisely that: one person. For Dorian to be in love with Sibyl because she's more than one person is to be in a relationship that is certain to fail (as it does).

"Yes ... you have killed my love. You used to stir my imagination. Now you don't even stir my curiosity ... I will never think of you. I will never mention your name."

— Dorian Gray, Chapter 7

Dorian Gray delivers these hurtful lines in an epic rant to Sibyl Vane backstage, after he has brought Lord Henry Wotton and Basil Hallward to see Sibyl act. When Dorian first fell for Sibyl, it was because she was beautiful and because she could act so well (and because of the unexpected pleasure of finding those first two qualities in a tawdry, low-end theater).

Now that she's in love, her performance has suffered. She tells him it is because she's in love that she can't act—that she used to act so well to escape a joyless life. She wholeheartedly believed in her theatrical roles and immersed herself in them fully. Now that she has Dorian's love she sees only the

artificiality of the theater, and so she can't act.

This extended speech is Dorian's response to Sibyl. Like many aspects of this novel, it is multifaceted. On one hand it shows great self-awareness for Dorian to know he loved Sibyl for all of these reasons. On the other hand it is both shallow and incredibly self-centered for Dorian to spout all of these things to the woman he had yesterday said he loved. He may be beautiful, but his soul is small and petty.

"Surely his wish had 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."

— Narrator, Chapter 7

After Dorian Gray breaks Sibyl Vane's heart, he goes home and glances idly at Basil's portrait of him. He's startled because it seems to have changed. He studies it, looks in the mirror, and contemplates the matter. These lines sum up his conclusion. This sequence establishes the final link in the critical device driving the plot. There is a magical relationship between Dorian and this painting. When he does something wrong, the effects show up immediately on the painting.

"But you must think of that lonely death in the tawdry dressing-room simply as a strange lurid fragment from some Jacobean tragedy ... The girl never really lived, and so she has never really died. To you at least she was always a dream ..."

— Lord Henry Wotton, Chapter 8

After Dorian Gray breaks off his relationship with Sibyl Vane so cruelly, she kills herself. Not knowing this, Dorian has been thinking about his actions and has written her a long letter of apology. Just then he receives news of her death from Lord Henry Wotton, who arrives to console him. As a result the news of Sibyl's death hits Dorian very hard.

He is talking about how terrible Sibyl's death is when Henry delivers a long speech containing this quotation. It recasts Sibyl, changing her from a dead 17-year-old girl into a figure of art. This statement is part of Henry's overall aesthetic approach to life, in which he keeps things at a distance and reshapes them for effect. Like many of Henry's statements, this is deeply profound. Dorian didn't really know Sibyl: she really was a kind of dream or projection, and Henry is insightful to see this. But like many of Henry's statements, this also is distant to the point of cruelty. Sibyl never really lived because she was desperately poor and killed herself due to Dorian's egotistical cruelty. The speed with which Henry reaches this perspective is part of the cruelty. He doesn't deliver his speech years after Sibyl's death, when the pain has passed. He says it a few minutes after Dorian learns about Sibyl's death. The tragic thing is—it works. Dorian moves on.

"He had always the look of one who had kept himself unspotted from the world. Men who talked grossly became silent when Dorian Gray entered the room. There was something in the purity of his face that rebuked them."

— Narrator, Chapter 11

After Sibyl Vane's death, Dorian Gray enters into an extended period of sensual self-indulgence. However, because of his magical relationship with Basil's portrait of him, Dorian's face does not show the result of any of his activities.

This summary of the effect Dorian's appearance has on others

is one of Wilde's subtler critiques of his society. As much as people like to speak of character and to claim they respond to what is deepest in others, the reality is all too often what Wilde describes: people see a pretty face and equate that with a beautiful soul.

"And, certainly, to him life itself was the first, the greatest, of the arts, and for it all the other arts seemed to be but a preparation."

— Narrator, Chapter 11

At various points in the novel, Lord Henry Wotton nudges Dorian Gray toward treating life aesthetically, which involves making it beautiful but also keeping it at a distance. At this point, after Sibyl Vane's death and after Dorian has read the stylized French novel Henry loaned him (and been so influenced by), Dorian has fully arrived at this position. He is now living the philosophy Henry espouses, so that his own life is a work of art. This frees him to indulge his senses and removes all constraints of ethics and social mores.

"A cry of joy broke from his lips. The man who had been shot in the thicket was James Vane. He stood there for some minutes looking at the dead body. As he rode home, his eyes were full of tears, for he knew he was safe."

— Narrator, Chapter 18

A release of Dorian's pent-up anxiety about James's threat of revenge, this sequence points to the importance of Sibyl's death in Dorian's life story. He certainly did far worse things—like killing Basil—but his shabby treatment of Sibyl was his first sin. It started him on the path to cruelty, and caused the first change in Basil's portrait of him.

"A cry of pain and indignation broke from him. He could see no change, save that in the eyes there was a look of cunning and in the mouth the curved wrinkle of the hypocrite."

— Narrator, Chapter 20

In Chapter 19 after James Vane's death, Dorian Gray sets out to change his ways and live a better life. He consciously chooses not to seduce and ruin an innocent young woman. After discussing the choice and the possibility of change with Lord Henry Wotton, Dorian decides, in Chapter 20, to look at his portrait and see if his attempt to follow a more ethical path has made a change in his appearance. These lines reflect what happens when he consults the painting. When Dorian spoke with Henry, he no doubt convinced himself he meant to change. Here, in Chapter 20, the portrait reveals what he really intends, and it is dark indeed. This shows just how extensive and profound the painting's magic is. It doesn't just absorb passing time and the results of Dorian's vices. It also knows him better than he knows himself. It is like a super-powered conscience, a kind of magic mirror reflecting Dorian's inner self more clearly than he can see it himself.

"When they entered, they found hanging upon the wall a splendid portrait of their master as they had last seen him, in all the wonder of his exquisite youth and beauty. Lying on the floor was a dead man, in evening dress, with a knife in his heart. He was withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage. It was

not till they had examined the rings that they recognized who it was."

— Narrator, Chapter 20

This description indicates that the fairy tale element of the story has run its course. All of the years and sins that had been transferred to the portrait are suddenly transferred back to Dorian in the instant he stabs the painting. The description is intentionally nameless. The servants who view this tableau see the beautiful painting and their master's rings on the aged corpse and thus deduce the reality.

It is worth noting that when Dorian stabbed the painting, Wilde did not say where he stabbed it. However, the knife is in the dead man's heart, indicating the painting was his heart. This aligns with Dorian's comments from Chapter 12 about keeping a diary of his life locked in a room. This painting was his diary, his heart, and his inner self.

Symbols

The Painting

By far the most important symbol in the novel is Basil's portrait of Dorian. The centerpiece of the plot, the portrait interacts with Dorian throughout the narrative. When Dorian does something immoral, the results show up on the painting, while Dorian's own face stays unmarked and beautiful. This painting is Basil's best work, but must, because of its magical power, remain unseen by everyone except Dorian.

Basil and Henry saw the portrait when it was first complete. Though it is rarely seen, this picture looms symbolically and metaphorically over the entire book. The picture takes the Victorian ideal of art to its logical extreme. If art is useful because it teaches a moral lesson, how perfect must this painting be since it is an immediate barometer of ethical changes? Basil's final glimpse of his masterpiece occurs when he says that to know Dorian he must see his soul. This viewing proves to be the artist's undoing; his horrified reaction to the portrait leads Dorian to murder his friend.

Flowers

Though they are far less important than the picture, flowers appear throughout the book. The opening line mentions "the rich odour of roses," and it is to flowers that Dorian turns in Chapter 2 to relieve his soul after Henry awakens him to the power and brevity of beauty. Dorian buys or orders orchids at key moments, such as when he's blackmailing Alan Campbell into disposing of Basil's body for him.

Flowers symbolize beauty and how briefly it lasts. Their fleeting beauty stands in stark contrast to the enduring ugliness that is captured in Dorian's portrait. The title character clings to something that is not meant to last, which brings inevitable repercussions.

Theater

The theater, as a type of art, serves as a form of escapism. Lord Henry advises that people should give in to temptation through indulgence, and Dorian uses art as one means of escaping the ethical concerns of his conscience.

The theater is the setting in which one of the characters of great importance to Dorian—Sibyl Vane—is primarily seen. It is the backdrop against which she artistically plays the characters that seduce Dorian into loving her. Once she and Dorian fall in love, it is the setting in which Sibyl—no longer able to act—destroys his love forever. It is the place of Dorian's indulgence while Sibyl's performances excel, and it is the place he rejects when Sibyl's performances are no longer pleasing.

The theater also symbolizes the way all the main characters play roles in their own personal dramas.

The Book

In Chapter 10 just after Dorian hides his portrait and learns the results of Sibyl Vane's inquest, he reads the "yellow book" Henry sent him. This novel changes Dorian's life. He buys multiple copies, rereads it, and lives its philosophy. This book, which he carries with him wherever he goes, symbolizes several closely linked meanings. Most directly it represents Henry's influence over Dorian. Generally, "controversial French novels" were bound in yellow during this period, so this book represents the influence of French literature. These yellow bound books were considered sensational at best, and decadent and immoral at worst, promoting both sexual and philosophical deviance.

Most specifically, this can be read as Joris-Karl Huysmans's *À Rebours*, a book of the decadent movement that Wilde read (and greatly admired) on his honeymoon. Once this book enters Dorian's life, he begins to live like he is part of the aesthetic movement. He is much more hedonistic. It also provides a means by which Dorian can practice Henry's belief about curing "the soul by means of the senses, and the senses by means of the soul."

Themes

Appearance versus Reality

Throughout this brief philosophical novel, Wilde explores the questions of what is real, what is appearance, and what matters most. He does this in a number of ways. The first and most central, of course, is the core detail of the story: the magical portrait of Dorian Gray. It begins as the young man's perfect likeness and the greatest work of Basil Hallward's artistic career. At the moment it is first displayed, appearance and reality are synchronized, at least for Dorian and those around him. However, they begin to diverge as soon as Lord Henry awakens Dorian to his beauty and vanity—and Dorian fervently wishes that his portrait would age in his place. Since Basil is a painter, his artistic calling is an ongoing reflection on the relationship between appearance and reality.

Sibyl Vane is the great love of Dorian's life, and her brief professional career as an actress is devoted to appearing to be something other than what she is. That's who she is, and paradoxically, it is close to her essence. Before Dorian she was skilled at acting because she believed love had no place in her life. Once Dorian changes her reality through loving her, she can no longer counterfeit the characters she used to play so well.

Art versus Life

Closely related to the theme of appearance versus reality is the theme of art versus life. This theme is more complicated, though, as one's appearance can be a simple lie, an accident, or an illusion, whereas art is something more. Art, for Wilde, requires style, conscious display, and an elevated aesthetic quality: it should be beautiful.

When Sibyl loses her artistic ability due to Dorian's love, she then loses Dorian. This makes it immediately clear that Dorian loved her in part (perhaps entirely) because of her art. Take away that art, as Dorian did, and the reason for Dorian to love Sibyl disappears.

Lord Henry also argues fairly consistently for the power and superiority of art. When Sibyl Vane dies, he urges Dorian to think of her death as "a strange lurid fragment from some Jacobean tragedy." Dorian accepts this guidance, and he allows Henry to steer him away from mourning and back to pleasure. Art, then, consoles in this novel just as it reshapes reality.

Reputation versus Character

Reputation is the story others tell about a person; character is that person's real nature. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* examines what happens when the two diverge. Wilde also casts an interesting and insightful light on how people judge these attributes. Once Dorian starts to indulge himself, many people

hear stories about him. In essence his reputation precedes him. These stories are not good and would ruin anyone else, socially.

However, because those around him believe one's character affects one's features, anyone who sees Dorian rejects these stories because of his pleasing physical appearance. They take the "proof" their own eyes offer them over the stories they hear, no matter how lurid or often repeated.

Pleasure versus Virtue

Pleasure takes many forms in this novel: art, beauty, sex, and drugs. Wilde explores pleasure's temptation and its relationship to virtue.

Though it is never made explicit in the best-known version of this novel, one of the main pleasures that is everywhere implied is homosexual desire. Both Basil and Lord Henry admire Dorian's beauty openly, and for an extended time. Their gazes linger in ways that are too possessive and erotic for them simply to be a shared love of abstract beauty. Dorian can manipulate them, especially Basil, and Basil is jealous of Dorian's spending time with others, a response more aligned with romantic love (or sexual desire) than with abstract appreciation. Because homosexual relationships were illegal in this period, before the story appeared in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* it was revised to make its sexual content less overt. Wilde further edited the story before its publication in book form.

The conflict between pleasure and virtue also appears in other ways—ways that really show how dark Dorian's character becomes in the novel. The opening scene of Chapter 9 may illustrate this most clearly. It is the morning after Sibyl has killed herself. Basil visits Dorian to check on him and make sure he's okay. Dorian is completely superficial and ready to gossip about the lightest social affairs. His willingness to focus on pleasure—*his* pleasure—so soon after his loss horrifies Basil.

Suggested Reading

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