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***THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY: ETERNAL THEMES OF  
MORALITY, BEAUTY AND FALSE VALUES THROUGH CENTURIES***

*Bachelor's Thesis*

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## **PREFACE**

In the manner of all great books, the only novel of Oscar Wilde “The Picture of Dorian Gray” offers us little that is new and, of course, does not open a new world for us, but still it remains a brilliant masterpiece at all times. It is a novel that at once very much of its time and locale (Victorian society of 1890's London) as much as for our contemporary time.

The novel reflects themes that have been human preoccupations for centuries. The novel has inspired numerous kinds of art such as opera, music, literature and finally cinematography. The latest novel’s screen adaptation (2009) together with the immortal book will be discussed in this research paper and common themes will be revealed. The aim of the research is to consider representation of morality (moral values as dignity, honesty, empathy, sanity) and an exaggerated importance of beauty in Oscar Wilde’s novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in the context of the Victorian era and to reveal their topicality nowadays by analysing their representation in the 2009 screen adaptation of the novel. To answer the research question analysis of relevant sources (in Introduction) will be conducted to introduce previous researches on the topic. Comparing the novel and the film based on it, the common themes will be revealed and the topicality nowadays will be shown.

The paper consists of the Introduction, two chapters and the conclusion. The introduction includes the context of the novel, its background - time and place, with the key issues and values of that time. The first chapter “MORALITY, BEAUTY AND HEDONISM AS KEY ISSUES OF THE NOVEL” comes out with the plot of the novel and conveys the main topics covered in the book. The mention of its screen adaptation is included as a prerequisite to the comparative analysis, conducted in Chapter II “THEMES OF MORALITY, BEAUTY AND HEDONISM: BOOK VS FILM”. The second chapter considers the comparison between the book and the film. It points out that even if the film is not a literal interpretation of the novel, it does cover the core of the story. The eternal issues are reflected both in the book and in the film and its topicality nowadays is proved. A comparative analysis is conducted using authentic information sources and examples. The conclusion sums up the results of the research and comment on the hypothesis that proves that the novel is still topical nowadays.

## INTRODUCTION

### **The Novel as Evidence of Wide Interest and Topicality**

The Picture of Dorian Gray is one of the most studied novels of the time. Being a shocking challenge to the society, it has provoked many controversial opinions and critics. As for Victorian criticism, it evaluated literature through the demands of morality and utility. “Most of the public furor over the perversity of Dorian Gray should no doubt be judged in light of the prevailing Victorian standard of moral earnestness as a mark of “sincerity,” as Karl Beckson urges. “In the eyes of his contemporaries, Wilde's carefully cultivated role as public sinner spoke louder than any protestations he made on behalf of his novel. Thus, despite his own best efforts in his defense, even a sympathetic critic like Walter Pater responded to topical interests rather than to the novel’s serious concern” (Dickson 1983: para 2). “Clever always, this book, however, seems to set forth anything but a homely philosophy of life for the middle-class - a kind of dainty Epicurean theory father -yet fails, to some degree, in this; and one can see why. A true Epicureanism aims at a complete though harmonious development of man's entire organism. To lose the moral sense therefore, for instance, the sense of sin and righteousness, as Mr. Wilde's heroes are bent on doing so speedily, as completely as they can, is to lose, or lower, organization, to become less complex, to pass from a higher to a lower degree of development” (Pater 1891: 87).

American litterateur Gerald Weales rejects the novel describing it as “terribly fin de siècle in a rather flippant introduction to the novel, and it would be difficult to find a critic who would choose to discuss it in terms other than the familiar ones of decadence, art for art's sake, art as “the telling of beautiful untrue things.” (Oates 1980: 420).

Being against the critical opinion that the novel promotes immorality, English literary critic of 19<sup>th</sup> century Robert Boyle so describes the Oscar’s work: “Those who rage and howl, like the critics of Wilde’s novel, suffer from seeing their own savage faces reflected in the artist’s creation. For the artist morality is of interest only as subject matter; ethics should not constrict his scope, nor does he concern himself with encouraging or discouraging moral behavior. The work of art is totally useless; it finds its goal within itself, a beautiful creation reflecting all things human. It should be contemplated for itself, and aims at no other use. Thus the critics who condemn it as having evil effects should look inside themselves for the causes of those effects, not in the work.” (Gale 2005: para 12).

Irish novelist and poet James Joyce has left his critical comment about the novel: “Wilde seems to have some good intentions in writing it — some wish to put himself before

the world — but the book is rather crowded with lies and epigrams. If he had had the courage to develop the allusions in the book it might have been better.” (Beckson 1974: 96). Both Wilde and Joyce saw the literature’s purpose in expression of man’s experience showing its entire psychological complexity. According to Joyce, Wilde lacked courage and was afraid of self-revelation.

Arthur Conan Doyle supported the novel in a letter to Wilde. In April 1891, Wilde replied him: "I cannot understand how they can treat Dorian Gray as immoral. My difficulty was to keep the inherent moral subordinate to the artistic and dramatic effect, and it seems to me that the moral is too obvious." (Baldwin 2000: 9).

Many critics wrote their essays on *Dorian Gray* raising the topics about aestheticism, ethics, beauty and morality itself as a subject matter (Duggan, 2008; Arnold, 2007; Aubrey, 2005). For example, Dominic Manganiello wrote about ethics and aesthetics in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* where he examines the consequences of substituting an aesthetic for an ethical conscience (Oscar Wilde and the Poetics of Ambiguity; 1996). A lot of criticism has been focused on discussing and analysing the topics in terms of how they have been revealed in the novel. However, the themes of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* have not been learned in terms of relevance to the contemporary time and topicality throughout the centuries comparing it with the last screen adaptation.

### **The Novel in the Victorian Society**

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* was published in July 1890. The Victorian period was near to the end. The traditional values and ethics of the Victorian society were weakening but still being alive in the minds of the most conservative. Therefore, the only novel of Oscar Wilde caused a public outcry in a pious Victorian England. In those days, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was characterised as scandalous and immoral. Typical idealistic image of behavior and modesty inherent to old-time Victorian England was discredited in the novel. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* contained radical ideas for the period of time it was written. It evoked a conflict between moral rules of the Victorian society and new controversial concepts raised in the book. Thus, sexual restraint being one of the main values of Victorian England contrasted with the hint of homosexual inclinations of the central characters in the novel. A strict code of conduct and moral obligation is broken by Dorian’s egoistic pursuit of pleasures and new sensations. The main hero’s actions seem a challenge to the Victorian society and its norms. Moreover, the low tolerance of crime as a distinctive feature of the period was misled when Dorian commits a crime killing his friend in a fit of rage. Main hero represents all what was disgraceful and

forbidden – all the vices condemned in Victorian society. Dorian Gray seems the first that dared to go against the norms. Probably for the people of those days the hero of the novel was a kind of embodiment of anarchy. In this way, symbolizing the rebellion against Victorian traditions the novel caused anxiety in society and received a sharp critique.

After the first publishing of the novel and a negative response, Wilde takes the courage to edit his work by adding new six chapters and a famous preface. The preface fully reflects the author's insight on aestheticism and its principles. Aesthetic philosophy is concerned with the admission of art for its beauty only. Meanwhile according to the Victorian traditional thought art should serve morality and include socio-political virtues. Oscar Wilde, on the contrary, was convinced that art is perfect by itself and does not need in a moral context. Moving against the norms of society, the author was the first who dared to bring up taboo subjects: hedonistic lifestyle, aestheticism, pursuit for the beauty and superficial values even if it is contrary to morality, social inequality and dual nature of society members. The author challenged the conservative society.

The novel provoked many negative comments and Wilde's contemporaries attempted to reject the reality of the themes developed there. Nevertheless, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* has always been topical: then and now, and it will be shown in the next chapters of the research paper. In order to get an idea of the historical background when the novel was written and to see its relevance to the atmosphere of the Victorian society the following informative passage based on the critics of Matthew Arnold and John Reed will be presented.

### **Values of the Time and their Interpretation in the Novel**

The topicality and truthfulness of the subjects covered in the book, and its relevance to the Victorian Era is easy observable through the historical context and the Victorian values and norms. Despite the protest against Wilde's novel that was accused as immoral, the themes revealed in it were not alien to the demonstratively conservative society of the time. The public outcry was only a feature of the vicious society that hid behind the masks and did not want to be exposed.

#### *Ambivalent Morality of Victorians*

The main features of the Victorian Era were a strict social code and the sense of strong morality. Victorian morality implies quiet ascetic tendencies such as espouse sexual restraint and the widespread cultivation of an outward appearance of dignity and restraint as well. Chastity was highly appreciated and, furthermore, many young people were getting married being almost ignorant about sexual relations. Feminine ideals were grace, delicate femininity

and innocence. They were not concerned about sexual feelings at all. At the same time, during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, brothels were very common and despite being illegal and socially unacceptable, many upper class gentlemen including Prince Albert (the eldest son of the Prince of Whales) were visiting them. In this way, the perception of sexuality was ambiguous and this aspect was reflected in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* very clear. Consequently, “the bombshell effect” of the novel was made, because prudery was one of the characteristics in this era of hypocrisy. Preoccupation with propriety and reputation prevailed in the high society of Victorian England. Nobody wanted to be found out in some obscene affairs. Though Oscar Wilde in his novel reveals the idea that those who are intended to be of an upper class may not always be of the same image they appear to portray. Some “noble” people who by society are held to what can be known as the highest social code, show lower moral value behind closed doors. It brings an idea of a double life – being „a man of dignity” playing a respectable role in society while inwardly conducting a presence that is far from acceptable behavior. This is one of the key issues in the novel. When Dorian Gray realizes that only the portrait will keep the signs of his own depravation while his appearance remains unchanged the character easily decides to neglect a social moral code of the Victorian era. His respectable appearance thought to be a “shield” that protects him from being accused of debauchery. In this way, Dorian has long managed to satisfy his dark desires and forbidden pleasures saving his image of a pious man in society.

### *The Image of Beauty*

Physical appearance was extremely important in the Victorian era. The one’s dress signaled about occupation and status in the society. What concerns to a face and stature, for Victorians they were the main indicators of the unspoken reflections and intentions of a person. Victorians trusted in physical appearance. They believed that one’s face and figure are able to disclose inner intentions and emotions of the person as accurate as attire reveals one’s occupation. This belief is easy observable in the literature of the period. American journalist and poet John Reed declares, “Victorian literature abounds with expressions of faith in physiognomy”. (Reed 1975: 336).

Emphasis on appearance is also reflected in Wilde’s novel as being one of the main preoccupations of the society. Beauty rules through the whole of the novel. The society in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* adores beauty, putting youth and physical appeal at the top of the main values. At the very beginning of the novel, the main character does not yet realize his attraction and does not take it serious. However, when Dorian’s portrait is finished and Lord

Henry highly estimates it reinforcing his idea about importance of beauty and youth, the hero suddenly comprehends all its power and became a slave of it. Admiring the portrait Dorian asks Basil, "How long will you like me? Till I have my first wrinkle, I suppose. I know, now, that when one loses one's good looks, whatever they may be, one loses everything. Your picture has taught me that." (Wilde 1979: 109). "Am I really like that?" and after Basil and Lord Henry confirm it he exclaims: „How wonderful, Basil!“ (Ibid. - 113).

Therefore, Wilde's novel is an obvious evidence of the pervasiveness of vain values of the Victorian society.

### *The Aim of Art: Aesthetic Tendencies against Morality*

Wilde's novel shows his engagement with aestheticism, the late-nineteenth-century arts movement that promoted art for the sake of its beauty alone, not for any utilitarian, moral, or political purpose. Aesthetic movement was against traditional Victorian concept of art as a self-satisfying morality.

The author's attitude to art reflected straight in the Preface was subversive for Victorian England's traditions, where art tends to have a strong moral sense. Early generation of Victorian writers believed that art must serve as a kind of didactic manual or be a sermon. Art was directly related with ethics and morality. Oscar Wilde, on the contrary, considered that art carries an inherent value being only worthy due to its beauty. The author sticks to aestheticism's belief that is "art for art's sake" and denies any attempt to find the meaning "beneath the surface". Art does not need to serve any moral purpose and turn to sermons.

The most vivid representatives of the Victorian society in the novel are Basil and Dorian. The main hero is shown as a man who barely cares about feelings, beliefs and thoughts of society. Dorian is not concerned about his low moral actions and its' consequences, not to mention that which can affect himself. Youth, beauty and prosperity remain the only values for him. Only the surface has an importance whereas real feelings and emotions fade away. Dorian even breaks up with an actress he thought he really loved because of her fail playing the last role on the stage. It appears that beauty of art and its presentation are the reason Dorian is attracted by her and takes it as love until the girl disappoints him. The young man enjoys the best and leaves when "spectacle" loses its onetime appeal. He does not care if somebody suffers of his actions. Lust and sordid pleasures are the main motives that he pursues. Depreciation of morality and appreciation of art for its beauty are shown in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and it reflects aesthetics' idea, so deeply involved in. It is also obvious if to follow the belief of artist Basil that the aesthete world is



one able to encapsulate in a witty saying. There is no need in deep ethics and its consequences – all this is of a little importance nowadays. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* can probably be taken as a picture of the late Victorian society - the Aesthetic Victorian society.

Talking about the themes developed in the novel and their relevance to the historical context of those times, the topicality of the novel for the 19th century is obvious. However, the fact that the novel is still being studied repeatedly by numerous critics of our times (Duggan, 2009; Craft, 2005; Pearce, 2001 etc) points out to its interest and topicality nowadays. It can be hypothesized that the film version of the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by O. Wilde follows the same pattern of values and characteristics of the Victorian Era but with the shift of the focus towards the society vices such as debauchery, mendacity, egoistic pursuit for pleasures.

# CHAPTER I

## MORALITY, BEAUTY AND HEDONISM AS KEY ISSUES OF THE NOVEL

### 1.1. Aesthetic Idea and Morality

Oscar Wilde's novel brings new concepts in traditional way of life in Victorian England. The author was the first to explore the issue of aesthetic lifestyle. Patrick Duggan admits, "The explosion of aesthetic philosophy in fin-de-siècle English society, as exemplified by Oscar Wilde, was not confined to merely art, however." (Duggan 2009: 3).

"Aestheticism can be defined broadly as the elevation of taste and the pursuit of beauty as chief principles in art and in life" (Livesey 2011: para 1). This new concept formed in Europe in the nineteenth century denies moral values and beliefs of the Victorian society, exalting beauty and life pleasures. Oscar Wilde shares his thoughts about this concept through his novel. First *The Picture of Dorian Gray* appeared in *Lippincott's Magazine* in 1890. It was criticised for being filthy. Wilde supports the main principle of aesthetic movement: the worship of beauty. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* suggests new moral norms and views that the author shares encouraging aestheticism. Obvious that Oscar Wilde was not an innovator of the Aesthetic movement but "he was a spokesman for the late 19th-century Aesthetic movement in England, which advocated art for art's sake" (Luebering 2011: 133). After the first published version of the novel was strongly criticised the author edited his work adding a preface and other six chapters to it. The well-known preface became a kind of anthem of aestheticism and it arouses a great discussion about the aim of art and its moral concept. According to Wilde, "...the artist is a creator of beautiful things. To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim." (Wilde 1979: 77). In this way, "Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming." The author brings an insight that the only aim of art is beauty that brings pleasure without any moral content. Furthermore, in his interpretation of aesthetics Oscar Wilde criticizes human beings who obediently behave according to social norms instead of allowing themselves to be free and happy at the greatest extent. "Aestheticism advocates whatever behavior was likely to maximize the beauty and happiness in one's life, in the tradition of hedonism. To the aesthete, the ideal life mimics art; it is beautiful, but quite useless beyond its beauty, concerned only with the individual living it." (Duggan 2009: 61).

The aesthetics values and hedonistic approach to life are emphasized throughout the novel. The character Lord Henry Wotton is aimed to express the author's insights on moral,

aesthetic ideas and hedonistic lifestyle. He enlightens Dorian and teaches him the philosophy of “New Hedonism” being a proponent of it. Lord Henry easily influences on Dorian and gives the young innocent man the faith in life dedicated to seeking forbidden pleasures regardless of reproach from society. “We are punished for our refusals. Every impulse that we strive to strangle broods in the mind, and poisons us... Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden itself” – preaches Lord Henry (Wilde 1979: 99). Life is worthy only if one lives to its fullest with no fear of disapproval of others. Dorian implements the idea of self-indulgence and egoistic amusements in life. Beauty and sensual pleasures become a main aim in his life.

Despite the worship of aesthetic ideals, it is to be mentioned that constant following one’s passionate desires and ambitions to have the most enjoyable life inevitably leads to some immoral acts. Living a pure aesthetic lifestyle without prudence brings destructive consequences. Dorian Gray shows how aesthetic beliefs can ruin the life if to pursue them blindly. In this way, Oscar Wilde not only demonstrates the Aesthetic movement in all its glory but also tells about its poisonous effect to moral that can occur. Inexperienced, impressionable and untutored Dorian Gray neglects social norms and moral values being involved in disgraceful affairs driven by lust and forbidden pleasures. Taboo and rules do not exist for him and he became uncontrolled in his acts. Talking about morality it is worth to mention the comment of Wilde from his letter to Alfred Douglas, his former lover: “All excess, as well as all renunciation, brings its own punishment” (Duggan 2009: 5). That was his conclusion about morality in Dorian Gray. In the letter to the editor of the *St. James’s Gazette* he wrote: “The painter, Basil Hallward, worshipping physical beauty far too much, as most painters do, dies by the hand of one in whose soul he has created a monstrous and absurd vanity. Dorian Gray, having led a life of mere sensation and pleasure, tries to kill conscience, and at that moment kills himself. Lord Henry Wotton seeks to be merely the spectator of life. He finds that those who reject the battle are more deeply wounded than those who take part in it.” (Wilde 2005: 412). From the one hand, aestheticism stays against one’s denial from ambitions and desires, nevertheless, from the other hand, blind and uncontrolled self-indulgence can be harmful and even fatal. In this way, even supporting aesthetic ideals Wilde warns to be cautious and prudent choosing this lifestyle. The character of Dorian Gray clearly demonstrates what awaits for one who thoughtlessly lets his passions go. Meanwhile Lord Henry remains an indifferent observer of his monstrous creation Dorian Gray, whom he inspired to live this life of sins. The first change in his personality occurs when he rejects Sibyl Vane. The young actress symbolizes for Dorian the beauty of art but her failed

performance ruins his aesthetic ideal and he leaves the girl with no regrets. “Without your art, you are nothing.” – claims cruel Dorian (Wilde 1979: 182). Later his compassion after the news about the suicide of desperate Sibyl transforms into indifferent observation of this as if it could be a dramatic play. Therefore, Dorian’s blind obedience to aestheticism is contrary to morality while the hero remains unconscious about it. “It seems to me to be simply like a wonderful ending to a wonderful play. It has all the terrible beauty of a Greek tragedy, a tragedy in which I took a great part, but by which I have not been wounded” – states callous Dorian (Ibid. - 198). Excessive disposition to unconditional aestheticism and hedonism start to poison his soul and mind. Seeking for his egoistic pleasures Dorian turns to be really selfish, narcissistic and indifferent to the adversities of others. Thus, the imminence of the conflict between the moral values and pure aestheticism becomes obvious. Narcissism is an important component of unconditional aestheticism. In arrogance, Dorian discloses lack of moral in his actions. The portrait illustrates the process of degradation of the hero and withering of his soul whereas Dorian enjoys his youth and beauty that seems to be eternal. Nevertheless, the retribution is not long to wait. Afterwards when the hero decides to start a new life and attempts to destroy his portrait he kills himself. The only heritage that is left after his death is his jewelries as a symbol of his real essence lies in admiration of the pure aesthetic life.

According to Wilde, aesthetic tendencies have to be taken with prudence and have reasonable limits that imply moral responsibility. Only being controlled is possible to avoid its adverse effects on society and on a person who preaches aestheticism itself. Otherwise, an unconditional application of these ideas can only have negative consequences. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* clearly demonstrates the fatal result of leading a pure aesthetic life on the example of the main hero. Dorian realizes all the consequences of his unrestrained actions and acting on impulses too late when the destructive effect has been already done. Regardless the pursuit of happiness and beauty forms an aesthetic ideal for Wilde, he notes the particular importance of moral obligation and deliberate approach. Uncontrolled aestheticism kills moral values depriving compassion and promoting egocentrism and degradation of personality. Sometimes vain wishes and desires must be ignored in order not to harm others or to engage a self-destruction. Aesthetic principles have to be in conformity with the moral ones and coexist together. Thus, according to Wilde’s insight, only deliberation before action instead of blind pandering to the whims can preserve morality.

Aesthetic tendencies together with arising decadence were shocking for the Victorian society as it was a great challenge to the traditional values and social norms of those times.

However, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was rather to warn people to be saner before to go under influence of the new movement than to popularise it. If to take into consideration that the prerequisites of pervasiveness of aestheticism occurred beforehand, the novel was written timely to give notice about possible consequences of aesthetic lifestyle. Unfortunately, the immediate reaction of the readers of those times was rather negative due to superficiality of their judgements. The comprehension of novel's topicality and inner sense came later.

## **1.2. Cult of Youth and Beauty**

According to Geoffrey Schöning, “the period in which beauty can express itself to the most and sensibility reaches its peak does not last very long of course: It is fleeting youth. The very circumstance nearly forces to lift it up into the hedonistic triumvirate of self-development, the permanent chase after new sensations, and physical beauty.” (Schöning 2000: 5). Therefore, it comes with no surprise that the cult of youth and beauty can easily be transformed to selfish hedonism as it happened with the main hero of the novel. However, before to start discussing the hedonism the importance of youth and beauty in the novel will be examined.

The worship of youth and beauty is one of the central ideas in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Already in the preface of the novel, Oscar Wilde brings us an insight of art saying that it's only aim is beauty. Thus, the preface serves as a kind of manifest of aesthetic beliefs. Talking about beauty from the aesthetic point of view, the author implies its wider meaning and only its concept in art. For the main characters of the novel beauty is placed over morality. “For the sake of beauty” became a kind of lifestyle, the reason that drives to act in a certain way. Supremacy of beauty and youth is shown straight from the first chapter of the book. Celebrated artist Basil Hallward bewitched by the great beauty of young man Dorian Gray paints his portrait to immortalize his esthetic perfection. The main hero is a muse for the artist who inspires him to create a masterpiece of art for the sake of its beauty.

When the portrait is near to be finished Basil visits Lord Henry Wotton, wit and cynic proponent of aesthetic philosophy and hedonism. In the conversation with Basil, he expresses his belief that beauty is the most important dignity of the human. At the same time, he meets handsome fellow Dorian and starts to admire his perfect appearance at first sight. Lord Henry assures Dorian that there is nothing impossible for one who has two privileges: beauty and youth. Impressionable Dorian easily falls under the influence of his senior fellow and shares these superficial values. The beauty of art firstly affects Dorian when he meets young actress Sibyl Vane who captivates him with the beauty of her talent on the stage. The transformation of the hero starts to disclose when he rejects Sibyl, as she does not implement his aesthetic

needs. Furthermore Dorian admires beauty to such an extent that he even use it to escape from awareness of the terrifying consequences of his reckless acts. The hero spends a lot of time studying and enjoying the beauty in different things like theatre, music, gems and other luxuries. “For these treasures, and everything that he collected in his lovely house, were to be to him means of forgetfulness, modes by which he could escape, for a season, from the fear that seemed to him at times to be almost too great to be borne.” (Wilde 1979: 247). Meanwhile, his belief in the power of beauty is reinforced by the adoration of society. Society of all times highly appreciates beauty and youth. People saw in Dorian, “...a type of which they had often dreamed... he seemed to be of the company of those whom Dante describes as having sought to “make themselves perfect by the worship of beauty.” (Ibid. - 233). Until Dorian Gray ruins his reputation with his scandalous disgraceful affairs that became known to the public, he is always a guest of honor at the banquets. The hero represents a nobleman and an exemplar for “the young exquisites of the Mayfair balls and Pall Mall club windows” (Ibid. - 233). The great beauty that lies in his appearance, perfection of his manners and fashionable dresses evokes fascination for him. Moreover Dorian’s flawless appearance could not allow suspect him in debauchery: “even those who had heard the most evil things against him... could not believe anything to dishonor when they saw him” (Ibid. - 231).

However, unconditional devotion for beauty and youth sooner or later leads to its negative consequences. Afterwards Dorian Gray pays a perilous price for his blind obedience to the superficial values that cost him his own soul. The fatal final of the novel implies the revaluation of values must be done in order not to end up like the main hero.

As it has been already mentioned, beauty and youth had a great importance for the Victorian society (see sub-chapter “The Image of Beauty” in the Introduction). According to the critic Alex Ross, “Wilde’s aestheticism, his fanatical cult of beauty, was the deepest and most lasting of his passions, and it is now the most radical thing about him” (Ross 2011: para 5). Moreover, Oscar Wilde not only expressed these values in the novel. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is also a kind of moralistic story through which the author attempted to warn his contemporaries against overvaluation of physical appearance at the expense of one’s common sense and conscious.

### **1.3. New Hedonism as an Antipode of Moral Obligation**

“Oscar Wilde is a proponent of hedonism and aestheticism. During the nineteenth century, one could not spout off his beliefs without fear of reproach, if not from the government, at least from society. Clever artists, such as Wilde, express their views through works of art. In

his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde uses the character Lord Henry Wotton to expound his thoughts on morals, aestheticism, women, art, and life as a hedonist.” (Burkholder 2015: para 1).

In the novel, Lord Henry is a proponent of hedonistic lifestyle: “A new Hedonism – that is what our century wants.” (Wilde 1979: 105). He stands against fear of criticism and condemnation of society in pursuit of pleasures. Lord Henry enlightens Dorian with Hedonistic philosophy telling that life is worthy only if dedicate it for seeking amusements and new sensations regardless to the opinion of society. He claims, “The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it” (Ibid. - 99), and Dorian takes the literal interpretation of this provocative statement. Lord Henry praises selfish enjoyments and debauchery. According to his belief, sane life is a waste of time. Life is now and it has to be lived to the fullest. Seize the moment and use all the chances that life generously presents no matter how it can affect the others – that is Lord Henry’s admonition. Eloquent and cynic aristocrat convinces Dorian that “We are punished for our refusals” (Ibid. - 99). Arrogant Lord Henry plays with his young fellow friend like with a puppet who obediently implements his provocative and vicious ideas in life. Meanwhile he remains an impartial observer of the regression of once pure soul. Being a member of high-class society, Lord Henry is safe and stays indifferent to the consequences of debauchery to which he provoked naive Dorian. New horizons and orientation in life are opened now for the hero. The idea of life full of joy and idle pleasure acquires a crucial importance for an inexperienced fellow. Afterwards these superficial values are the main motivation to act. Dorian recklessly dedicates his life to the chase for new adventures and vain desires. Thus, the new evil of society appears in the face of the main hero of the novel.

Oscar Wilde was the first to raise the issue of hedonism in the nineteenth century. He dared to talk about subject that already took place in the Victorian society, but was a forbidden topic for discussions. According to the writer John K Burkholder mentioned above the Wilde timely showed transient values of the Victorian society, openly pointed at them. Moreover, despite being mentioned centuries ago, the topic still preserves its topicality nowadays. The parallels of hedonistic programme of modern society are observable in the present time. “These are on the one hand self-realisation and the motive to be always seeking sensations, and on the other hand the cult of youth and beauty mania.” (Schöning 2000: para 2). However, the topicality of the topic on tendencies of New Hedonism nowadays is examined in the next chapter.

#### **1.4. Main Heroes in the Novel: Ambiguous Attitudes to Life**

The most influential character throughout the novel is Lord Henry Wotton. According to many critics (Liebman 1999; Aubrey 2013), Lord Henry is a cynical man with a sharp wit who manipulates others to act in pursuance to his own hedonistic beliefs. According to Liebman (1999: 298), “Henry’s beliefs are based on the assumption that there is no moral order (the universe is purposeless and indifferent to human needs); that the self is not only multiple, but at war with itself and driven by forces beyond its control; and the morality is arbitrary and relative. This moral position leads to a withdrawal from human engagement, the pursuit of pleasure (both sensual and intellectual) as a distraction from disillusionment, and the manipulation of others for one’s own enjoyment and edification.” (Liebman 2015: para 5). The author of a critical essay on “The Picture of Dorian Gray” describes Lord Henry as a person who puts art higher than life, praising it for the possibility to experience emotions without being really affected by them. In his attitude to the protagonist, he sticks to the same point. Lord Henry plays the role of the so-called serpent that encourages Dorian’s self-absorption and provokes a pliable young fellow to be fearless in his selfish pursuit for pleasures.

Meanwhile Wotton stays apart being only an idle observer of other’s life of degradation and the process of decay of the Dorian’s formerly innocent soul. Obviously, Lord’s eloquent expression of hedonistic ideas put a great input into main hero’s evil transformation. Impressionable Dorian easily allows his elder fellow to influence his thoughts, to alter his personality and perception of life. “Yield to temptation” is a belief which praises Lord Henry, but he does not implement it in his own life. He is a kind of tired aristocrat who exploits the main hero, playing with him like with an obedient puppet. Lord Wotton lives his life through the impressions that he receives from sensual pleasures and disgraceful acts of his young friend. He enlightens Dorian with the principles of “New Hedonism” and seduces him to live a sinful life chasing for his egoistic desires. Lord Henry was not directly involved in any dubious affairs; however, he was an advocate of sin, having a poisonous effect on everybody who he encounters, including Dorian Gray himself. Various critics have a similar opinion on the character of Lord Henry. Despite the fact that Lord Henry only voices his ideas but not lives them in his life, he is the main evil from the beginning of the novel. The ambiguous attitude to life is only seeming. Wotton is only a „circulator of infection“, but the main reason why he does not implement his ideas in his own life is to avoid wounds, not to be hurt by. “...Lord Henry’s ideal, which is to cultivate an intensity of experience whilst paradoxically remaining undisturbed and untroubled by it.” (Aubrey 2005: para 4).



Consequently, this bored aristocrat attempts to live his aesthetic life through young, beautiful and naïve Dorian Gray.

Dorian Gray is an embodiment of human's dual nature – his body and soul are symbolically divided. Terrence Dawson in his critical work also mentions “Dorian's dual nature”, and other critics such as Bryan McKay (2006), Simon Callow, Bryan Aubrey (2005) support this idea. The duality of the hero is obvious. While he acts being unconscious of his deeds, his distorted portrait plays a role of his own soul, separated from him. In this way, the main hero shows what can happen with one who is entirely devoted to superficial values like beauty and youth. At the beginning of the novel, the protagonist appears for the reader as an innocent and inexperienced in life fellow of great beauty. However, he does not realise it yet. The situation changes dramatically when he meets an eloquent and tricky Lord Henry – a stickler of a “New Hedonism”. “Totally under Lord Henry's spell, this refined young man with high ideals adopts his mentor's words to the best of his ability.” (Aubrey 2005: para 10). Easily adopting a clear hedonistic approach to life, Dorian Gray makes a step to the way of degradation. He tries to escape from all unpleasant things that occur in his path and unconsciously seeks for new sensations and amusements. His behavior is characterised by evasiveness. Dorian does not want to be aware of any consequences of his actions and take any responsibilities of his deeds. For instance, he avoids talking about Sybil's death, when Basil Hallward comes to tell him this news. The hero believes that only expression gives reality to things. In this way, “He felt that the secret of the whole thing was not to realize the situation” (Wilde 1979: 270). Dorian seeks for shelter from all his evil deeds' effects in art. He sticks to pure aestheticism in life. For example, despite mourning after Sybil's death he goes to the opera the same evening. The moral conduct of traditional society does not have any importance for him. Dorian remains indifferent to everything and everybody excluding himself and his vain wishes. “More involved in the world than Lord Henry and giving full rein to his love of beauty and his quest for novel sensations, he allows himself to become a poisonous influence on those around him. He becomes indifferent to the effects of his actions, which not only destroy others (in ways never specified) but also leave him fatally marred, despite the illusion — for that, ultimately is what it is — generated by his unchanging youthful, beautiful appearance.” (Aubrey 2005: para 12). Being impressed by the wit statement of the Lord Henry “to cure the soul by means of the senses, and the senses by means of the soul” (Wilde 1979: 102), Dorian attempts to implement these beliefs in his life. However, he only quenches the thirst for sensual pleasures, whereas the soul remains contaminated by hero's misleading acts.

The only character who wants to purify Dorian's damned soul is Basil Hallward. As the above-mentioned heroes, he also dedicates his life to art, but in a certain sense. First of all, Basil is a creator of art rather than its indifferent spectator. Being an outstanding artist, Basil has a great sense of beauty and after meeting Dorian Gray, he becomes devoted to the youth and allure of his new charming friend. However, Hallward represents an old-fashioned aesthetic movement since he puts morality higher than art and can abandon one for the benefit of the other if it will be necessary. Basil is a withdrawn but a decent man who in contrast with Lord Henry wants to improve Dorian and to instruct him on the right path. Nevertheless, he does the same mistake that Dorian does with Sybil Vane. According to the critic Bryan Aubrey, "He allows himself to be drawn out of the sphere of Art into that of Life, and no good results from it." (Aubrey 2005: para 11). Afterwards Dorian reproves him telling that Basil flattered him and taught him to be vain of his appeal. In this way, the artist unconsciously influenced Dorian in his way of self-destruction. Nevertheless, Basil preserves his moral and ethical beliefs and awareness. Basil Hallward notices how mean and indifferent becomes the main hero and tries to call for his reason. Unfortunately, Dorian goes too deep in his dissolute life and there is no hope for salvation anymore. Instead of cure of the soul, Basil's sermons provoke the hero to commit a crime in a fit of rage. At the end of the novel Dorian finally feels remorse and wants to change his way of life. However his attempt to confess Lord Henry to the murder of Basil fails due to aristocrat's firm aesthetic belief that a man of great beauty has no vulgarity for to do something like this. Therefore, Lord Henry's implicit faith in his aesthetic ideals brings him to illusions as harmful as those that accompany Dorian leading his unconscious life. Critic Bryan Aubrey states, "The worship of art and beauty may have its place, but it proves to be an inadequate guide through the troubled maze of real human experience" (Aubrey 2005: para 14).

As a result of the analysis of the main heroes, their values and attitudes to life, emerges a parallel between the subjects that have been preoccupations of the society centuries ago and the issues that remain topical nowadays. In addition, the types of personalities that represent each of the hero with their personal beliefs about life can be easily recognised among our contemporaries. It is clear that the themes of moral, beauty, questionable values and tendencies in life that Oscar Wilde tried to reveal for the most aware members of the Victorian society remain topical and relevant nowadays. The main hero of Wilde's novel was a kind of precursor to our modern generation. Throughout the centuries were made 10 films and 3 adaptations based on the novel, which accounts for the topicality of the issues reflected in Wilde's masterpiece.

The next chapter introduces the review of the latest film based on the book, the comparison between the book and the movie is made; the eternal themes of morality, beauty and false values raised both in the book and in the film are considered.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **THEMES OF MORALITY, BEAUTY AND HEDONISM: BOOK VS FILM**

#### **2.1. Dorian Gray Review**

The latest screen version of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is considered to be *Dorian Gray* by Oliver Parker filmed in 2009. Admittedly, it cannot be taken as a literal adaptation of full value but rather as another viewpoint on the novel. Nowadays the film is the best rendition into cinema; however, this brash version is far from cult play and has several defects. According to the EMPIRE Magazine (Blog about Film reviews, movie news and interviews), the book is as difficult to adapt as it was to write. The strongest point of the film is a setting that remains unchanged. The story takes place in the Victorian era like it was in the novel. As claimed by the Guardian's film critic Peter Bradshaw (2009), "Toby Finlay's adapted screenplay has some clever new plot inventions and there's a great turn from Colin Firth as the debauched aesthete Lord Henry Wotton." However, the plot was overplayed.

The film reviews of critics Will Lawrence (from the The Empire Blog about film industry) and Dave Calhoun are the most adequate and capture the main points to be mentioned. The following review is based on the articles of these authors.

Film starts with an episode of murder that points for the circular narrative style used at the beginning of the film. Then the plot develops in the chronologically sequent order. Dorian Gray arrives in London to receive his rich heritage. Being a little boy he was adopted by a prosperous but a cruel man who hit him. It becomes clear from the scene of hero's coming back to the homeland that he was absent for a long time. From the opening scene of the film, Dorian Gray is a young lad naïve in his beauty and innocent in his soul. His thoughts are pure and intentions are noble. Dorian Gray is polite and virtuous gentleman, a worthy member of society. To highlight his goodness the filmmakers even invented an episode that was not mentioned in the novel itself: shortly after his arrival in London Dorian gives a charity piano concert. There he meets a talented artist Basil Hallward who becomes enamored with his beauty at a glimpse. During Dorian's play, he even manages to draw a portrait sketch astoundingly resembling the fellow. Afterwards Basil starts painting a full-length portrait of Dorian Gray in his working studio. Meanwhile becoming bored the sitter says to the artist that for two weeks spent in the city he has made a very few new acquaintances. Then Hallward takes Dorian to the party organized by a famous aristocrat Lord Henry Wotton. This wit man with eloquent speech and liberal manners stands out from all the members of the high society

class and immediately attracts the attention of the hero. At the same time, an awkward young fellow is a newcomer among the cloying public what attracts Lord Henry's attention to him. As soon as Lord notices the boy, he comes to meet him. Even from the first meeting it becomes clear that this encounter will not lead to anything good. The aristocrat offers a cigarette to the young fellow. This scene was a symbolic one giving a sign of detrimental effects that are yet to come. When Dorian's faithful friend Basil witnesses his encounter with the palace owner, he warns the naïve lad not to give importance to the Lord's words. The artist was as if foreseeing the corruption of his inexperienced young friend.

Lord Henry is present when Basil is finishing Dorian's portrait. For having a break before the final works on the paint, the aristocrat brings the artist and the sitter to the dens of London with all its dirt and filth. Therefore, Dorian meets the pervasive outskirts of London. The artist leaves the place earlier and then Lord Henry starts to inspire the hero with his philosophy of life. The man states that there is nothing impossible for one who possesses two privileges: youth and beauty. He claims that sanity does nothing but kills the time. "Life is now. There is no after. So let the life burn with a hot fire". In this way, Lord Henry begins to influence on the boy praising the hedonistic way of life.

Soon the portrait is finished and Lord Henry admires it saying the artist that it is one of his best works. Observing finished work Dorian asks if he really looks so. The aristocrat answers that not really. He states that the portrait will stay the same forever while Mr. Gray will not. Tricky Lord hints the boy that his beauty and youth will not last forever. In contrast to him Basil says that this, what is not eternal has a special value. However, the boy is already affected with the provoking speech of the wittiest one. His words now sound in sensitive mind of Dorian and it acts like a poison spreading through his blood. Lord Henry impressed the boy so much that he even wishes to make a deal with a devil: to sell his soul just to remain always young and beautiful. He desires that the portrait ages with a time instead of him. Dorian curses himself without being aware of it. These days Dorian Gray meets a young beautiful actress Sybil Vane. The hero's soul is still pure and he falls in love with the girl. After a while, the fellow announces to his friends that he is going to marry Sybil but she does not know about his intentions yet. Dorian calls his friends to see her in the theatre. Lord Henry quickly accepts this invitation but offers the boy to visit a smoking club first. He easily became the main authority for the hero. This wit-debauched aesthete takes him under his vicious wing and opens the doors to the perversions of London. As a result, Dorian indulges in sinful pleasures in a den. He betrays Sybil and after leaving the place, mates cynically come to visit the girl. They lie that they dwelled in the smoking club. However, the actress

detects the deceit and when she asks Dorian to tell the truth he becomes angry and leaves her. In desperation, Sybil commits suicide and drowns herself. When Dorian gets known the news he is grieving but his mood easily changes after a conversation with Lord Henry. Suddenly the hero becomes calm and even goes to the party next evening. So starts Dorian's transition from the docile young to the self-possessed man chasing of his vain desires. He leads an immoral life dedicated to naughty pleasures. Dorian and his "faithful" mate Lord Henry recklessly seize every moment and yield every temptation they encounter - visit dens, organize dissolute parties with a lot of alcohol and women of easy virtue, use drugs. Meanwhile Dorian manages to maintain his good name unsullied for a certain time. However Basil Hallward who knows the lad very well sees that Dorian changes. Being preoccupied the artist decides to talk with the adde youth but the hero evades the conversation. After a while, nevertheless, they will have to face for a serious conversation, which became fatal for Basil. The artist prepares for his art exhibition in Paris and wants to take his masterpiece the portrait of Dorian. The owner of the picture refuses to show it but when the artist insists on his wish, angry Dorian decides to reveal his secret. Hallward is shocked by this terrifying transformation of his brilliant work. He realises now how corrupted became this once innocent boy. The artist tries to convince the hero to cleanse his soul and repent of his sins but Dorian tells that it is too late and kills Hallward in a fit of rage. He throws the body in the river but soon the police found it. Obviously, nobody suspect Dorian in committing the crime. During the funeral, the hero cynically delivers a speech to the memory of his "friend". These days he informs his old mate Lord Henry that he goes to Egypt. The hero left London for many years and when he comes back, he appears to the London society the same young as the last time they have seen him. In front of the astonished audience, he meets an already grown-up daughter of Lord Henry Emily Wotton. Young lady is immediately attracted by father's old friend. She seeks for a meeting with him and asks him about his life. Emily is impressed about how Dorian managed to preserve his youth and beauty. Dorian says that his life was dedicated to the pleasures of all kind and it is better for her not to know about them. Emily admires the life of Dorian without knowing what is hiding beneath the surface. She tells that also would like to lead the life full of joy and eternal beauty of youth. Meanwhile the hero claims that pleasures and happiness are not the same things. Dorian now repeats saint words of dead Basil that a real value has only what is not infinite. From this time, the hero's consciousness begins to awaken. He wants to improve his life and leave the vicious circle he was stuck in. Looking for salvation of his soul, he comes to Emily. He realizes that he fall in love with this sincere and warm-hearted girl. Therefore, he decides to sell his palace and

move to another place together with Emily. The last day before leaving the palace Dorian organizes a farewell party in it. Suddenly he sees a sinister vision from his past and runs to the attic to check his portrait. Lord Henry feels that something is going on wrong and follows the hero. Finally, he discovers the secret of Dorian Gray and his picture. In a state of terror, Lord ignites the portrait and runs away from the attic locking Dorian inside. Desperate hero does not even try to escape. Realising all destruction he made the doomed hero pierces the cursed portrait. As a result, he transforms into an ugly beast from the image on a picture and then dies.

## **2.2. Book vs Film: Preserved Main Ideas above Inventions**

The comparative analysis of the novel and the film is necessary in order to discover whether the main issues of the society have changed or remained relevant or even more topical nowadays. The following table will be supported with the explanatory comments to differences, mostly inventions in the film (that is often overaction; an attempt to achieve a stronger effect) which, however, have not changed the heart of the novel and convey the author's ideas but in a wayward way.

<b>Book</b>	<b>Film</b>
<p>1. The novel begins with the Preface where the author shares his ideas about his aesthetic beliefs on art. The philosophy of art is the only one topic that was important for Oscar Wilde and was omitted in the film. At first sight, the film unlike the novel was focused on entertainment of the public.</p> <p>2. In the book, there is no information about Dorian's interests before he meets Lord Henry.</p>	<p>1. The film starts with a violent and bloody episode of crime. Dorian Gray kills his faithful friend Basill Hallward – a creator of his vicious portrait, and gets rid off the body throwing it into the river of Thames. Retreat from chronological order is used in order to attract the watcher from the very beginning of the film. This method helps to get full attention of the audience (including those who have not read the book).</p> <p>2. At the beginning of his stay in London Dorian Gray takes part in a charity piano concert, which highlights his innocence and beauty of his soul that is not yet corrupted.</p>
<p>3. At the end of the novel, there is no redemption of the main hero. He is too deeply mired in the depths of depravity. The only conscious remains in the image of the portrait, which Dorian decides to destroy and with it, destroys himself.</p> <p>4. Dorian meets thirsting for revenge brother of Sybil in the tavern, while smoking opium to forget the memories of Basil, and with it, once again lull his conscience.</p>	<p>3. Invention in the film: the daughter of Lord Henry that brings an idea of redemptive love. The hero falls in love with Emily Wotton and decides to do away with the dissolute life. Despite the fatal end, for a while it gives us hope for salvation of his soul (there is always a place for salvation until it is too late; „point of no return“).</p> <p>4. Repentant Dorian comes to the grave of Sybil and there he meets James Vane. (In the film Dorian starts regretting about his vicious deeds; he wants to purify his soul, come back to a normal sane life). In contrast to the novel, in the film the idea of</p>



<p>5. Fatal final: trying to destroy his portrait that embodies his sleeping consciousness, Dorian Gray kills himself.</p> <p>7. Sinful pleasures of errant Dorian who easily exposed to the poisonous influence of Lord Henry ... →  Apart from sinful pleasures and debauchery, the hero uses aesthetic amusements (like enjoying beautiful things, luxurious possessions, art, books, diamonds, gems) as an escape from reality („to turn off his consciousness“).</p>	<p>hero's repentance is more developed. Dorian Gray feels strong pricks of consciousness and even tries to confess in his sins in church.</p> <p>5. At the final scene, Lord Henry insensibly follows Dorian to the attic, and after discovering his secret reflected in the portrait, he ignites the portrait and locks the hero to burn with it. In this way, Lord Henry kills his own monstrous creation. (How puppet can be destroyed in the hands of experienced puppeteer; a vulnerable mind under a bad influence).</p> <p>6. CGI (computer-generated imagery) is used to make the film more vivid by the means of special effects rather than to make more impressive the story focusing on the plot.</p> <p>7. In the film, it turns into even more dreadful and disgraceful deeds (exaggeration in order to get an extra visual appeal); explicit scenes including short homoerotic episodes and even sadomasochism. Obviously, in order to attract more public. On the other hand, it also brings to the idea that the issues of beauty, morality, selfish hedonistic tendencies reign with a more power nowadays.  In addition, Dorian's pleasures in the film are shown one-sided: drugs, alcohol, and sexual debauchery. The film lacks aesthetic concept.</p>
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As a result of the comparative analysis between the original novel and the film, there are some noticeable inventions. However, despite these inventions, the film is quiet relevant

to what Oscar Wilde wanted to convey in his novel. The screen adaptation just obtained form that is more grotesque. If in the book there is more smooth and gradual transformation of the main character into an evil and deeply corrupted person, in the film it is an accelerated transition from a noble young fellow to a depraved one. The reason is that film lacks dialogues and wit conversation between the main heroes Dorian Gray and Lord Henry. Meanwhile, it is a usual situation in the process of writing the script based on the novel's plot. Obviously, the advantage of the screen adaptation is the possibility to show the characters and their actions omitting extensive explanations and descriptions of their emotions, thoughts and actions. Though some events deviated from those in the novel, the film reflects the essence of the book. Meanwhile, the film expresses Wilde's ideas more unembarrassed and unvarnished whereas the novel has many allusions to some issues that was forbidden to talk about freely in Victorian England. The issues of dual morality, obsessive beauty and commitment to sinful pleasures undoubtedly took place in those times, but due to hypocrisy of the Victorian society, many themes were taboo in order to save the face and reputation in public. Nowadays there is a complete freedom of speech and everybody is able to express oneself freely without any constriction of the society. Tolerance inherent in our contemporary society has become a symbol of permissiveness.

The film director Oliver Parker explains his intention to adopt this novel, "I was keen to delve into the darker side of Wilde's works, liberate their dialogue from the plays, and create a new world on screen. As with every classic, there is an eternal dynamic. Its themes – those of obsessive beauty and youth – are urgent." (Parker 2009: para 7). Eternal themes gained greater force and intensity nowadays. The film highlighted the topicality of the themes of morality (which is pointed at through amoral deeds of Dorian Gray; Lord Henry's personal morality which lays in adjusting ethical code to suit personal needs and desires; Basil's understanding of morality – belief in people's sanity); the pursuit of beauty (importance of physical appearance for society and its favour to the beautiful people), and false values that are widely followed through the constant chase for selfish pleasures of a pure hedonistic lifestyle. The main themes of the novel are reinforced and even enhanced in the film due to the topicality in our contemporary life. The corruption of our modern society is perfectly shown in *Dorian Gray* (2009). Meanwhile, the novel reveals the false bottom of the Victorian society and the film reflects the society of our days with all their evil vices and obsessions. The themes of ambiguous morality, beauty and false values remain topical through the centuries. However, if Wilde's contemporaries were trying to hide their depraved inclinations (that testifies that they still were able to understand that it is bad), today people mostly have

no preoccupations about being revealed or convicted in their misleading deeds. Vices of society became now more explicit and evident. Moreover, a great number of people who even lead a sane life become passive supporters of humankind's decay through proclaiming tolerance. It is a kind of shield for those who are not able to take an active position and have a personal opinion about debauched generations. Lack of social judgement and impunity give birth to more and more new „Dorian Grays“ who are sinking way deeper into the abyss of depravity with no shame nor fear.

Nowadays such a term as „Dorian Gray Syndrome“ exists, which once again gives evidence for the topicality of the novel and its themes. The next sub-chapter explains what is implied under the eponymous syndrome.

### **2.3. Dorian Gray Syndrome (DGS): Importance of Beauty Nowadays**

The notion “Dorian Gray Syndrome” attributes to the main hero of the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. By analogy with the character, DGS conveys sociocultural phenomenon that is defined by person's obsession in his physical appearance, beauty and youth. People with this syndrome are also characterised as psychological immature and narcissistic. It is highly important for them to preserve their youth and flawless appearance and afflicted with DGS are willing to go to extremes in the pursuit for physical perfection. In this way, inherent to them excessive concern about excogitated defects and flaws in the body, leads to a so-called “Medical Lifestyle” including fascination with plastic surgery, botox, transplants and so on. Beauty industry is developing increasingly fast and has a great influence on our generation. Majority of modern society members are alike the protagonist of the novel whose hedonism, self-absorption and excessive self-love affects personal, social and emotional sphere of life. Man who is fully concentrated on his appearance and its improvement will sooner or later reach the point when former beauty methods are not be helpful anymore. Otherwise, the consequences of the abundance of beauty treatments together with the natural aging process will disfigure the appearance of this person. As a result, it will cause depression and in the worst case - suicide. Apart from that, even those DGS affected who realise that they have a mental problem and unhealthy attitude to their appearance, would barely look out for help. According to the author of the article „Forever Young? *The Dorian Gray Syndrome*“, the reason is that „Some might not want to live a life burdened by compulsory thoughts of this kind, but be able to fully enjoy their lives and take life as it is – like so many others do.“ (Fellner 2011: para 3).

Apart from what was said above, it is worth mentioning that the *Dorian Gray* Syndrome is a serious psychosomatic illness rather than just a narcissistic obsession with one's appearance and its constant improvement. It is diagnostically characterised by serious symptoms such as body dimorphic hypochondriac imbalance (one is obsessive in finding body defects which does not really exist), social phobia coupled with narcissistic regression, and denial of any personality-structuring process of growth to maturity. (Brosig 2000). In the novel, the main hero demonstrates separate features of *Dorian Gray* Syndrome: narcissism and obsessive wish to avoid the process of ageing is satisfied due to the portrait that grows older and disfigures in time instead of its owner. Obviously, the syndrome named after the character of the novel implies even more and worse psychic disorders including compulsive illnesses, delusional disorders up to schizophrenic psychoses. Thus, centuries ago, Wilde used *Dorian Gray* to indicate emerging obsessive tendencies and the hero was a precursor to the emergence of this disease.

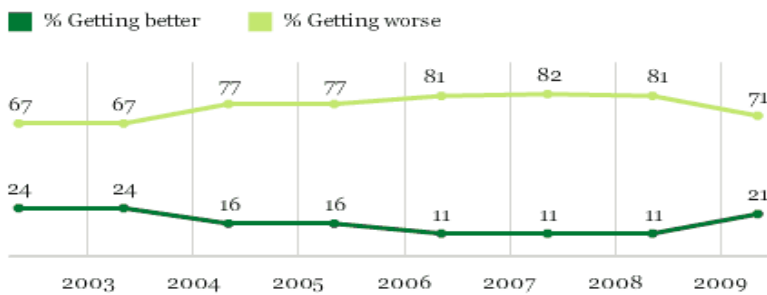
#### **2.4. Reinforced Hedonism: Deterioration of Society's Values Nowadays**

In the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the character Lord Henry enlightens hedonism: "A new Hedonism – that is what our century wants." (Wilde 1979: 105). Oscar Wilde noticed Victorian's disposition to the hedonistic lifestyle hidden under the ostentatious following the norms of conduct within sight of the society, whereas indulging in the pleasures of all kinds behind closed doors. Nowadays the topic of hedonistic way of living and false values remains topical. Moreover, today people are already not required to stick to a strict moral conduct, like it was centuries ago. Society has got more freedom to what life to lead, how to act and which values to adhere. Scales of harmful hedonism now are impressive. If in the Victorian era people needed to restrain themselves in some cases, today people have no hindrance or brakes. Furthermore, due to social, technological and economic progress man has now more attractions and stimulus to be seduced with a pleasure-seeking lifestyle, and materialism as one of its component. Often people selfishly try to satisfy their growing appetites: they love materialistic things, and use people whereas in fact things are made to be used and people to be loved. In the novel, hedonism of the main hero was expressed in his obsessive narcissism, aestheticism in love for beautiful and luxurious things and uncontrolled sexual behaviour. Nowadays the list of hedonistic pleasures is expanded: uncontrolled shopping that makes many people to get into debt, buying all the time new "toys" that now include electronic gadgets, cars and other products of the technological progress, widespread cyber-hedonism (spending many hours in Internet seeking for virtual pleasures, video games etc). Moreover,

even increasing number of divorces is often caused by self-absorption in relations and uncontrolled sexual lusts, drug addiction.

According to the Gallup poll statistics, 71% of the people believe that our society values are deteriorating. Public opinion is unpromising. As the low values closely connected with worsening morality, the moral standards are noticeable reduced nowadays. The following graphic demonstrates public opinion on the topic:

*Right now, do you think the state of moral values in the country as a whole is getting better or getting worse?*



GALLUP POLL

*Graph 1 Are our society's values deteriorating?*

From the commentaries of the pollees it is clear that the situation is getting worse. The majority of respondents admit that the only important values for our contemporary society are constant selfish pleasures and its instant satisfaction. „People no longer care about how their interactions with others effect the outside world. Today, everything is about instant gratification and pleasure. I can do whatever I want to anyone, but they dare not do it back to me. I can close the door in someone's face, push them aside in annoyance, or publicly humiliate them. Anything that gives me a shot of pleasure is acceptable - because I am the exception. This mentality is being fed by social media. People are given the perfect place to totally immerse themselves in themselves - if you wanted to you could literally spend all day for the rest of your life looking at nothing but pictures of yourself, and doing nothing but talking about yourself. None of your 5,000 „friends“ will say anything, because it would be hypocritical of them.“ (*Are our society's values deteriorating?* 2015: para 1) – that is how the opinion of one of the most active respondent looks like. This idea is relevant indeed. For instance, our advertisement industry affects our mind making us really materialistic and self-regarded consumers of various products, often superfluous. Modern people are obsessed with material wealth and a lot of them in this way replace real happiness that brings, for example, friendly and respectful relations with people or the warmth of hearth, with instant pleasures that often have a harmful effect on the surrounding of the wayward one. Other respondent addresses an important aspect of new generation morality. He declares that about a rough 75%

of children who were born after 2008 will never know what a real value is. As the previous respondent, he sees the main powerful evil in mass media that lacks quality and whose production is aimed to earn more money. This is a kind of a bad example of how people can be easily manipulated, example that the most vulnerable and gullible people follow. Every time the number of amenable to this poisonous influence grows.

In this way, in Wilde's novel the only corrupting influence on the main hero his „friend“ Lord Henry has. However, being an inexperienced and naive boy, malleable Dorian Gray becomes easily depraved. Nowadays the world is full of people and things that are even more powerful in their detrimental effect than Lord Wotton. As a result, the number of deeply „infected“ members of society is growing and they are worse than 19th Dorian Gray indeed.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of the research was to consider representation of morality (in particular moral values as dignity, honesty, empathy, sanity) and an exaggerated importance of beauty in Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in the context of the Victorian era and to reveal their topicality nowadays by analysing their representation in the 2009 screen adaptation of the novel.

The whole work consists of four parts: the Introduction, Chapter I, Chapter II and the Conclusion. The Introduction represents previous researches on the novel and it contains controversial opinions of various critics of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as well as our contemporaries. A considerable variety of studies on the novel shows wide interest and topicality of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The Introduction also includes the historical context of the novel, its background – time and place. The key issues and values of that time such as ambivalent morality, the image of beauty, aesthetic tendencies (in the tradition of hedonism) are presented. Introduction shows that being written in Victorian England the novel perfectly reflects the society of the time: sane and highly moral in public; hypocritical and graceless behind closed doors.

The first chapter “MORALITY, BEAUTY AND HEDONISM AS KEY ISSUES OF THE NOVEL” considers the topics of aesthetic idea and ambiguous morality, cult of youth and beauty, new hedonism as an antipode of moral obligation and ambiguous attitudes to life of the main heroes in the novel. As a result of the analysis of the topics a parallel emerges between the subjects that have been preoccupations of the Victorian society (conveyed in the novel) and topical issues nowadays. In order to reveal the relevance of the novel's themes to the modern world a comparative analysis of their representation in the 2009 screen adaptation of the novel is submitted in the second chapter „THEMES OF MORALITY, BEAUTY AND HEDONISM: BOOK VS FILM”. The outcome of the analysis demonstrates that the film *Dorian Gray* has updated the novel's ideas to highlight modern society's vices such as selfish hedonism, debauchery, narcissism, materialism. In addition, the chapter introduces the sociocultural phenomenon of today - *Dorian Gray Syndrome*, named after the main character of the novel - the evidence of the extant importance of beauty and youth in modern society, that is even more exaggerated than centuries ago. In order to reinforce the topicality of novel's ideas on morality, the public votes' „Are our society's values deteriorating?“ results are demonstrated in the chart and the commentaries of the pollees are presented. The statistics show that 71% of the respondents believe that our society values are getting worse. People are rather pessimistic about the modern attitude to life: selfish hedonism and materialism have

enslaved our contemporary society. Thus, the vices expressed in Wilde's novel are not only topical but also reinforced nowadays. Corruption of the humankind is evident: debauchery has become more flashy, importance of beauty transformed into obsession and, in some cases, even a serious mental disorder; genuine moral is replaced with false values.

The fact that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is still being studied by numerous critics of our time (Duggan, 2009; Craft, 2005; Pearce, 2001 etc) and that the ideas of the novel are used in the modern screen adaptation and that the themes of the novel still worry our contemporary society – all these facts prove novel's topicality nowadays and suggest new interpretations of eternal values depicted in the novel in today world.



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## SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Vaadeldava töö teemaks on „*Dorian Gray portree: moraali, ilu ja vale väärtuste igavened teemad*”. Töö eesmärgiks oli kaaluda moraali ning liialdatud ilu tähtsuse esindatus Wilde romaanis ning paljastada selle teemade aktuaalsus analüüsidest nende esindatus 2009. aasta romaani ekraniseeringus.

Töö koosneb neljast osast: sissejuhatus, kaks peatükki ning järelalus. Sissejuhatav osa sisaldab romaani ajaloolist konteksti, selle tagapõhi – aega ja kohta, koos tool aega võtmeküsimustega ning väärtustega. Samuti on esitatud kriitikute arvamused ning on mainitud eelmised tööd romaani kohta. See aitab tuvastada, et käesoleva töö teema ei ole varem uuritud ning on väärt, et arutada. Esimene peatükk on teoreetiline osa, kus arutatakse romaani peamised teemad: esteetiline idee ja mitmetähenduslik moraali, nooruse ning ilu kultus, uus hedonism kui moraali kohustuse antipood ja romaani tegelaste mitmetähenduslik ellusuhtumine. Tulemuseks on tekkinud paralleel 19. sajandi ühiskonna murede ning tänapäeva aktuaalsete probleemide vahel. Selleks, et paljastada romaani teemade aktuaalsust meie ajas, teises peatükis on esitatud praktiline osa. See osa sisaldab romaani ning selle ekraniseeringu võrdlevat analüüsi, mis näitab, et film järgib sama väärtuste mustreid, kui aga romaani teemad on esitatud liialdatud kujul, on rohkem grotesksed ja toretsevad. Samuti on sisse toodud mõiste Dorian Gray sündroom, mida iseloomustab inimene, kelle mure välimuse pärast muutub kinnismõtteks. Seega idee ilu tähtsust, mis mängib olulist rolli romaanis on väga aktuaalne meie elus ning see isegi muutus absurdseks. Peale sellele, teises peatükis on ka esitatud rahvahääletuse tulemused „Kas meie ühiskonna väärtused on halvenenud?“ ning avalik arvamus selle kohta. Vastavalt küsitlusele, 71% inimesi on veendunud, et meie põlvkonna väärtushinnangud ning moraalsus halvenesid. Tänapäeva ühiskond on rikutud niivõrd, et meie aja „Dorian Gray“ on isegi hullem kui 19. sajandi romaani peategelane.

Asjaolu, et *Dorian Gray portree* veel uuritakse meie aja arvukad kriitikud (Duggan, 2009; Craft, 2005; Pearce 2001 jne), romaani ideid kasutatakse tänapäeva ekraniseeringus ning nad kimbutavad meie ühiskonda, märgib huvi romaani vastu ning selle aktuaalsust tänapäeval.

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