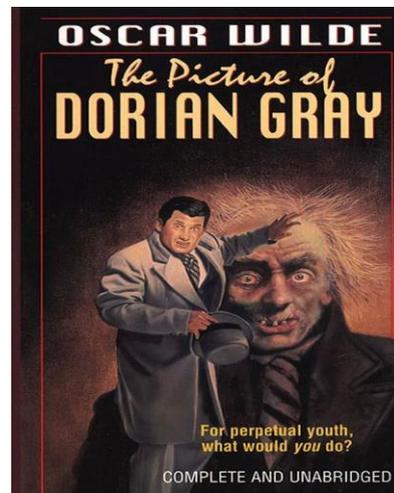
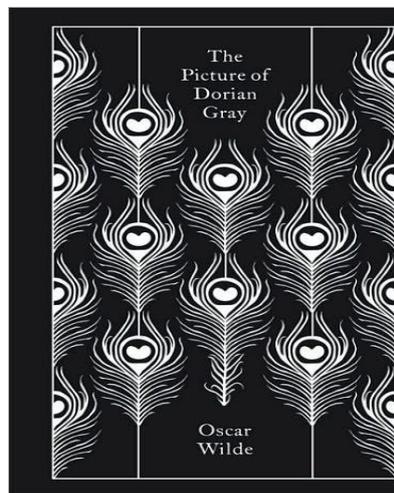
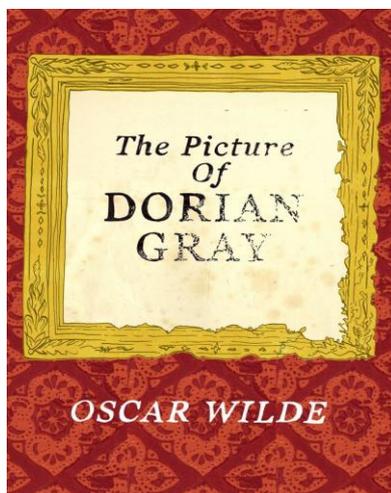
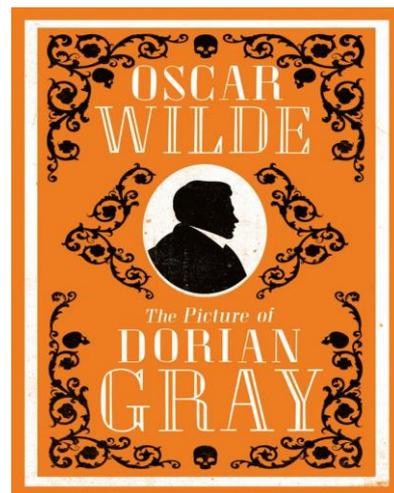
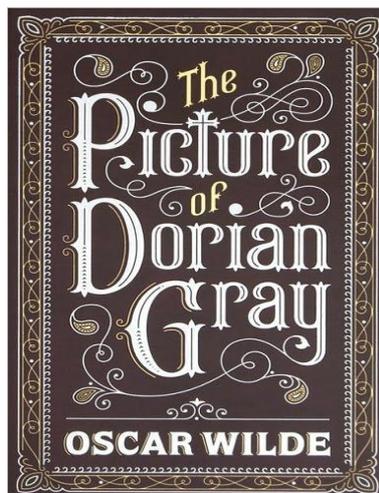
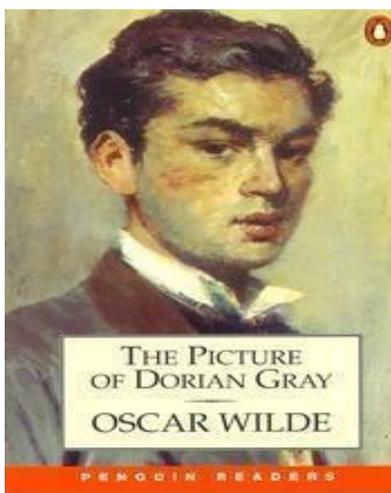
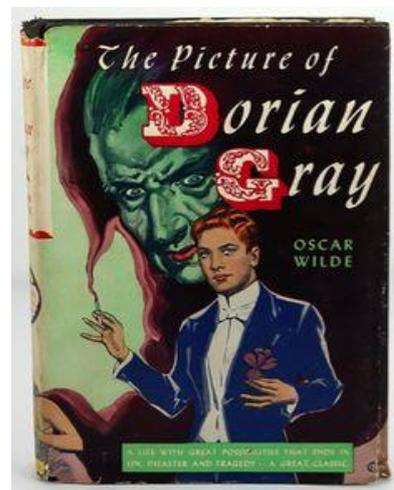
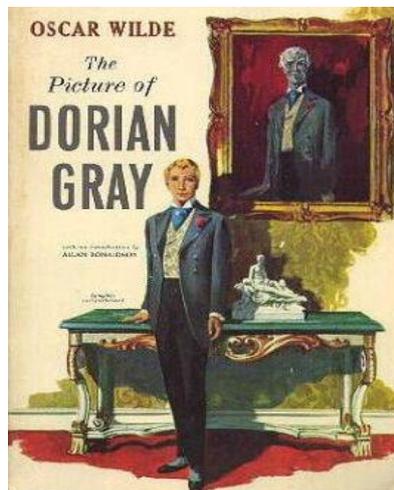
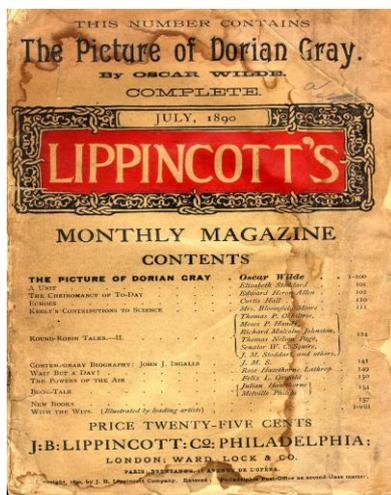


Compiled by Jane Horsfield

# The Picture of Dorian Gray

## By Oscar Wilde (1890)



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*“the more delicate perfume of the pink-flowering thorn”*

## Please note:

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Jane Horsfield





# The Life of Oscar Wilde (1854-1900)

## Early Years

Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde was born on October 16th, 1854 in Dublin, Ireland. He was the second child of parents Sir William and Jane Wilde; his older brother, William Robert Kingsbury Wills Wilde, was born in 1852 and his younger sister, Isola Francesca Emily Wilde, would be born in 1857. Wilde's mother, born Jane Frances Elgee, was a woman of immense character whose thoughts and actions heavily influenced her son. Wilde's biographer, Richard Ellmann, notes that Lady Wilde renamed herself "Speranza Francesca Wilde" and frequently pretended to be younger than she truthfully was, which helps to explain Wilde's fascination with name and age in his later work (6-7). Another way his parents influenced him was through their own writing. His mother was a prolific poet who published nationalist poems in Irish newspapers and his father, who was a physician, wrote many successful medical books.



In 1864, Wilde and his older brother were sent to live and study at Portora Royal School in Enniskillen; it was here that Wilde began to make a reputation for himself. Ellmann notes that "Wilde alone among the boys wore a silk hat on weekends" and one of Wilde's classmates cited him as "more careful in his dress than any other boy" (Ellmann 23). Such instances can be taken as early assertions of his later dandyism. In 1871, Wilde was awarded a Royal School scholarship to Trinity College in Dublin. At Trinity he showed an aptitude for classics, and was awarded the Berkeley Gold Medal for Greek near the end of his study in 1874. Confident of his strength in the subject, Wilde took an examination on June 23rd of the same year which gained him a Demyship (or scholarship) in classics at Magdalen College, Oxford.

## Oxford

In *De Profundis* (1905), a letter written during Wilde's imprisonment, he remarks, "the two great turning-points in my life were when my father sent me to Oxford, and when society sent me to prison." Wilde's matriculation at Oxford was clearly a significant moment in his life, and his four years there would prove to be a period of self-reinvention. Inarguably, Wilde found life at Oxford much more exciting than life at Trinity College. He became a Mason of the Apollo Lodge, drawn in by their secrecy and required costume, and he even tried his hand at rowing, though he was quickly dismissed from the team (Ellmann 40). Partly with help from these activities, Wilde developed a public persona at Oxford that he would carry with him upon graduation. A good friend of Wilde's, David Hunter Blair, claims that his "good humor, unusual capacity for pleasant talk, and Irish hospitality" gained him much popularity in the form of Sunday evening gatherings (Pite 8).

Academically, Wilde performed well at Oxford. Though he seemed to neglect his studies during his first two years, Ellmann attributes this conception to his preference of a reputation of "brilliance without zeal" (43). In reality, Wilde was well prepared by his education at Trinity College and also had a natural ability when it came to the study of classics. Such circumstances allowed him to spend less time reading required texts and more time reading in other fields, both of which contributed to his preferred image of being naturally intelligent rather than a diligent worker. Wilde graduated from Oxford University in November of 1878 with a double first in his *Literae Humaniores*, or "Greats" program. He was also the first scholar from Oxford to win the Newdigate Prize, for his poem "Ravenna," since 1825.

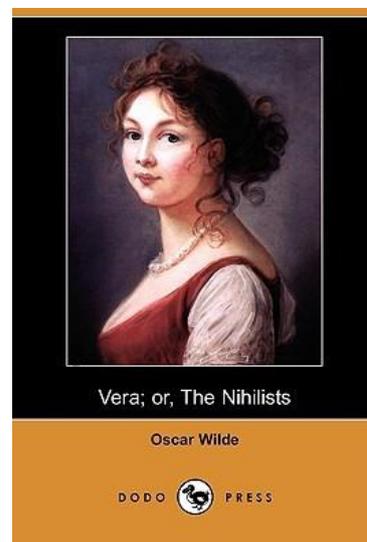
## Early works

Upon graduation, Wilde faced an uncertain future. He was not offered a fellowship and a writing career would not provide him with financial stability. His mother urged him to marry an heiress, but his only female love interest, Florence Balcombe, had recently accepted a marriage proposal from Bram Stoker, who would later write *Dracula* (Ellmann 99). Therefore, Wilde set off for London shortly after receiving his Bachelor's of Arts in search of a career.

He was welcomed into London society, mixing well with high-profile personalities like William Gladstone and the Prince of Wales (Ellmann 108). Before leaving Ireland, Wilde sold his inherited property and as a result, was able to take up residence in a house off of the Strand with the artist Frank Miles. It was here that he wrote his first play, *Vera; or, The Nihilists* (1880).

In May of the following year he signed a contract with David Bogue to publish his first set of poems, which was plainly entitled, *Poems* (1881). Wilde was made

responsible for all of the costs of publication, and in turn, small percentage of its overall profit. Ellmann notes that the subject matter of these



Compiled by Jane Horsfield

poems constantly wavers between Christianity and Paganism, and cites this observation as proof of Wilde's fascination with and inclination towards contradictoriness (139-143). Unfortunately, the compilation met harsh criticism, and Wilde was even accused of plagiarism.

Frank Miles's father was shocked by the immorality of the poems and forced his son to break relations with Wilde. Upon hearing that Miles would obey his father's wishes, though it was solely because he was financially dependent, Wilde, in a characteristically dramatic fashion, threw his trunk of clothes over the banister and smashed an antique table while declaring that he would "never speak to [Miles] again as long as [he] lived" (Ellmann 148).

## Wilde in America & Personal Life

Unexpectedly, Wilde received an offer from New York producer Richard D'Oyly Carte to travel to America and give a lecture tour. Wilde accepted the offer to lecture on the [aesthetic movement](#) in December of 1881 and began his preparations. He knew he was not a strong orator; therefore he sought to win over America with his ostentatious dress and natural style of speaking (Ellmann 154-155). Wilde arrived in America on January 2nd, 1882 and to his own surprise was met onboard the ship by a number of eager reporters. Ellmann suggests that the press was perhaps even more surprised by Wilde's large stature, fancy green coat, and husky voice than he was by their invasive questioning (158). Not yet ready to begin his tour, Wilde spent his first week in New York making appearances at various parties and productions. He gave his first lecture on January 9th, closing with the lines, "We spend our days looking for the secret of life. Well, the secret of life is art" (Ellmann 166). Overall, he was a great success in New York and subsequently earned the respect of one of his favorite poets, Walt Whitman. He sailed home on December 27<sup>th</sup>, 1882.



*"The first duty in life is to assume a pose," Wilde said, "what the second duty is no one yet has found out."*

*"He thought of the self as having multiple possibilities, and of his life as manifesting each of these in turn."*

From *Oscar Wilde*, by Richard Ellmann.



*Wilde, Lloyd, and their son.*

After experiencing the excitement that was his American tour, Wilde had little interest in remaining stationary. In the years immediately succeeding his return to London he would live in Paris for a few short months and return again to America, all the while finishing his second play *The Duchess of Padua* (1883) and attending the New York opening of his first play, *Vera* (first performed in August of 1883).

Unfavorable reviews of the performance and continued financial concerns led Wilde back to his mother's suggestion that he marry into a wealthy family. He had met Constance Lloyd in May of 1881, prior to his first trip to America, and now, with his mother's approval, began to seriously consider her as a marriage prospect. Ellmann suggests that Wilde's interest in marriage was not only the result of a desire to secure himself financially, but also the result of his need to project a heterosexual image of himself onto society (233).

By this time, rumors were already circulating about his homosexuality and his flamboyant manner of dress did nothing to help the situation. Since homosexuality was still illegal, these rumors had a negative affect on his credibility, and consequently, on his success as a writer. Therefore, thinking a marriage might help to silence such gossip, Wilde proposed to Lloyd in November of 1883 and married her on May 29th of the next year. Lloyd received £250 a year from her grandfather and would receive nearly £900 a year after his death, thus easing Wilde's financial problems. Overall, the match was a happy and supported one, though it is probable that Lloyd admired Wilde more so than he did her (Ellmann 247).

In the early years of their union it became evident that Wilde was quickly tiring of married life. As noted before, he had been suspected in his bachelorhood of having an interest in young males, but most agree that Wilde's first real homosexual encounter was with Robert Ross, whom he met at Oxford in 1886. Ross would remain a close friend of Wilde's until his death, but it was Wilde's later relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas that would change the course of his life. They first met in June of 1891, shortly after *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) had been published in book-form. Douglas admired Wilde greatly, but Ellmann notes that his temperament

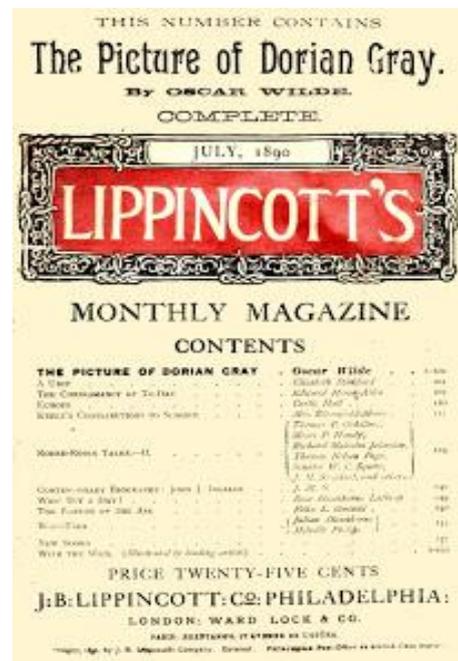


was "totally spoiled, reckless, insolent, and, when thwarted, fiercely vindictive" (324). Over the next few years, their relationship intensified and they were practically inseparable. However, Douglas was perhaps even more extravagant than Wilde and frequently relied upon Wilde's generosity whenever ongoing disputes with his father left him without an allowance (Ellmann 385-387).

*Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas- the love of Wilde's life.*

## Later Works

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* was first published in Lippincott's magazine on June 20th, 1890. It was later revised and published in book form in April of 1891 by Ward, Lock and Company. The story focuses on a beautiful youth, Dorian Gray, and his relationship with both Lord Henry Wotton and Basil Hallward. Lord Henry influences Dorian with ideas of a new Hedonism. In the opening chapter he tells Dorian, "The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden to itself, with desire for what its monstrous laws have made monstrous and unlawful."



He goes on to emphasize the value of youth in life and causes Dorian, in examining the portrait that Basil painted of him, to exclaim that he would trade everything in order to retain his youth and to have the portrait age instead. Dorian's wish is granted and he proceeds down a path of lust and excess under the advisement of Lord Henry. The initial reviews of the novel were mixed. Some praised Wilde and others claimed that the novel was "tedious and dull, that its characters were 'puppies,' that it was merely self-advertisement, and that it was immoral" (Ellmann 320). Whatever the review, the book did gain much attention, particularly for the subtle suggestion of a homosexual relationship between Dorian and the two other central figures. Some critics were outraged and called the novel immoral. Wilde adapted the novel, changing the offending passages and adding in new chapters. He also added in the Preface.

Written by Wilde himself, the [Preface](#) to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* can stand apart from the novel as an outline of aesthetic doctrine. The Preface also functions as a defence of Wilde's novel.

### **Trials & Prison**

Lord Alfred Douglas' father, the Marquess of Queensbury, became increasingly more irritated by the public relationship between Wilde and his son. He wrote a letter to Douglas claiming, "If I catch you again with that man I will make a public scandal in a way you little dream of; Unless this acquaintance ceases I shall carry out my threat and stop all supplies..." (Ellmann 418). The Marquess continued to antagonize Wilde, prompting him to sue for libel. The trial opened on April 3rd, 1895 at the Old Bailey, and Wilde, feeling secure in his prosecution, upheld a humorous demeanor in the courtroom. Upon taking the stand, he lied about his age, claiming to be thirty-nine instead of forty-one (Linder). As it soon became evident that Wilde would not win the case, he withdrew his prosecution under the advisement of his attorney.

Unfortunately for Wilde, the defense had gathered plenty of evidence, in the form of male prostitutes which Wilde had solicited, and they were able to turn the case around to prosecute him. Wilde was given time to flee, but was struck by indecision and missed the last train out of England (Ellmann 456). His first criminal trial opened on April 26th, 1895, but the jury could not reach a verdict, leaving Wilde free on bail. The second trial opened on May 22nd, 1895, and had a very different outcome. Wilde was convicted on all counts except those relating to one of the many male prostitutes who testified. He was sentenced to two years of hard labour, and would spend the last eighteen months of his sentence at Reading Gaol.



*Reading Gaol*

In prison, Wilde spent his time reading and was even allowed to write. During his sentence, he completed his famous poem, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898), and wrote *De Profundis*, which would be published posthumously in 1905.

### **Exile and Death**

Wilde was released from prison on May 19th, 1897 and quickly fled to Dieppe, a port on the French coast. He met Robert Ross here, though he refused to rekindle his relationship with Douglas. As a result, Douglas wrote a letter childishly accusing Wilde of "hating him," which Wilde denounced (Ellmann 529-530). Eventually, Wilde desired a reunion with Douglas, but was deterred by threats from his wife. When it became obvious that Constance would not allow Wilde to see his children, he agreed to reunite with Douglas in Rouen in August of 1898. Wilde sent Douglas a

telegram stating, "Everyone is furious with me for going back to you, but they don't understand us. I feel that it is only with you that I can do anything at all. Do remake my ruined life for me, and then our friendship and love will have a different meaning to the world" (Ellmann 547).

Upon his release from prison, Wilde seemed committed to restarting his life and avoiding further scandal. However, as he became reacquainted with the idea of freedom he seemed to realize that for him, life could only follow one course. He said of Douglas, "I love him as I always did, with a sense of tragedy and ruin.... My life cannot be patched up. There is a doom on it.... I was a problem for which there was no solution" (Ellmann 549). Therefore, his return to Douglas is indicative of him accepting what he felt to be his fate. The relationship would end a few months after their reconciliation, with Douglas returning to London and Wilde to Paris.

When Wilde underwent ear surgery on October 10th, 1900, his wife, Constance, had been dead for two years. Following the surgery he developed a severe case of meningitis from which he would not recover. Wilde died in Paris on November 30th, at the young age of forty-six. Robert Ross, his former lover and loyal friend, was by his side and alleged that Wilde was consciously received into the Catholic Church upon his deathbed. Douglas arrived in Paris on December 2nd, in time for the funeral, and is said to have almost fallen into the grave when the coffin was lowered, as he was competing among others to be the "principal mourner" (Ellmann 585). Wilde was first interred at Bagneux, though his remains were later moved to Père Lachaise Cemetery where they still remain.

*Wilde once stated, "Basil Hallward is what I think I am: Lord Henry is what the world thinks me: Dorian is what I would like to be in other ages, perhaps."*

## **Wilde's Major Works**

*Ravenna* (1878)  
*Poems* (1881)  
*The Duchess of Padua* (1883)  
*The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890)  
*Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892)  
*Salomé* (1893)  
*A Woman of No Importance* (1893)  
*The Sphinx* (1894)  
*An Ideal Husband* (1895)  
[The Importance of Being Earnest](#) (1895)  
*The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898)  
*De Profundis* (1905)



Oscar Wilde

## Victorian Era

The Victorian Era is agreed to have stretched over the reign of Queen Victoria (1837 – 1901). It was a very exciting period with many artistic styles, literary schools as well as political and social movements. Furthermore the era was characterized by rapid change and developments in nearly every sphere, from advances in medical, scientific and technological knowledge to changes in population growth and location. It was a time of prosperity, broad imperial expansion and great political reform. This rapid transformation had a huge impact on the country's mood. The age began with confidence and optimism, which led to an economic boom and growing prosperity. At some point the prosperity gave way to uncertainty regarding Britain's place in the world.



*Queen Victoria*

The Victorian Era is today seen as an era of many contradictions. Social movements concerned with improving public morals existed next to a class system that imposed harsh living conditions on many people. Dignity and restraint were contrasted to prostitution and child labour.

### Class

Early in the nineteenth century the labels "working classes" and "[middle classes](#)" were already coming into common usage. The old hereditary **aristocracy** (people of noble birth holding hereditary titles and offices), reinforced by the new gentry who owed their success to commerce, industry, and the professions, evolved into an "upper class" which maintained control over the political system, depriving not only the working classes but the middle classes of a voice in the political process. The increasingly powerful (and class conscious) middle classes, however, undertook organized agitation to remedy this situation: the passage of the [Reform Act](#) of 1832 and the abolition of the [Corn Laws](#) in 1846 were intimations of the extent to which they would ultimately be successful.

The working classes, however, remained shut out from the political process, and became increasingly hostile not only to the aristocracy but to the middle classes as well. As the **Industrial Revolution** progressed there was further social stratification. Capitalists employed skilled working class industrial workers. The unskilled working class- part of the "under class" of "sunken people"- lived in poverty. Skilled workers acquired enough power to enable them to establish Trade Unions which they used to further improve their status, while unskilled workers and the underclass beneath them remained much more susceptible to exploitation, and were therefore exploited.

This basic hierarchical structure, comprising the "upper classes," the "middle classes," the "Working Classes" (with skilled labourers at one extreme and unskilled at the other), and the impoverished "Under Class," remained [relatively stable](#) despite periodic (and frequently violent) upheavals, and despite the Marxist view of the inevitability of class conflict, at least until the outbreak of World War I.

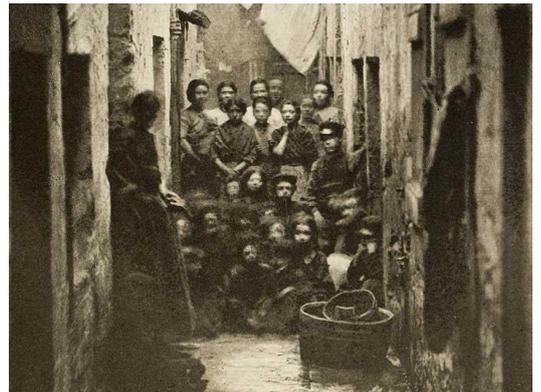
London epitomized the process of [social stratification](#) which took place in Great Britain. As the city grew in size, the poor became increasingly crowded into the filthy slums in the eastern part of the city while the merchant and the professional classes and the gentry established themselves in the fashionable suburbs in the west.

### **The Victorian 'Gentleman'**

The concept of the nineteenth-century Gentleman is a complex one. The Victorians themselves were not certain what a gentleman was, of what his essential characteristics were, or of how long it took to become one. Why, then, were so many of them so anxious to be recognized as one?



Members of the British aristocracy were gentlemen by right of birth (although it was also emphasized, paradoxically enough, that birth alone could not make a man a gentleman), while the new industrial and mercantile elites, in the face of opposition from the aristocracy, inevitably attempted to have themselves designated as gentlemen as a natural consequence of their growing wealth and influence. Other Victorians — clergy belonging to the [Church of England](#), army officers, members of Parliament — were recognized as gentlemen by virtue of their [occupations](#), while members of numerous other eminently respectable professions — engineers, for example — were not.



The concept of the gentleman was not merely a social or [class](#) designation. There was also a moral component inherent in the concept which made it a difficult and an ambiguous thing for the Victorians themselves to attempt to define, though there were innumerable attempts, many of them predicated upon the revival in the nineteenth century of a chivalric moral code derived from the feudal past.

[Charles Dickens](#) was an author of relatively humble origins who desired passionately to be recognized as a gentleman, and insisted, in consequence, upon the essential dignity of his occupation. *Great Expectations*, which contains a great deal of disguised self-analysis, is at once a portrait or a definition of Dickens's concept of the Gentleman and a justification of his own claim to that title. [Thackeray](#), on the other hand, insisted (and the two old friends quarrelled over this matter) that a writer of novels could not be a gentleman.

Eventually, the Victorians settled on a compromise: by the latter part of the century, it was almost universally accepted that the recipient of a traditional liberal education based largely on Latin at one of the elite [public schools](#) — Eton, Harrow, Rugby, and so on — would be recognized as a gentleman, no matter what his origins had been. In what ways would such a compromise help to perpetuate the English Class system?

### **Earnings (of the no-so-gentlemanly)**

A skilled London coach-maker could earn up to five guineas (£5, five shillings) a week - considerably more than most middle class clerks. This was the top of the working class pyramid. The railways generated employment for porters and cab-drivers. The London omnibuses needed 16,000 drivers and conductors, by 1861. Conductors were allowed to keep four shillings a day out of the fares they collected, and drivers could count on 34 shillings a week, for a working day beginning at 7.45 and ending often past midnight. A labourer's average wage was between 20 and 30 shillings a week in London, probably less in the provinces. This would just cover his rent, and a very sparse diet for him and his family.



## Costermongers

During the late 1800s there were probably about 30,000 street sellers (known as costermongers) in London, each selling his or her particular wares from a barrow or donkey-cart. The goods for sale included: oysters, hot-eels, pea soup, fried fish, pies and puddings, sheep's trotters, pickled whelks, gingerbread, baked potatoes, crumpets, cough-drops, street-ices, ginger beer, cocoa and peppermint water as well as clothes, second-hand musical instruments, books, live birds and even birds' nests. Some specialised in buying waste products such as broken metal, bottles, bones and 'kitchen stuff' such as dripping, broken candles and silver spoons.



*A costermonger selling 'fancy wear' ornaments*

## On the Streets



*Mudlarks scavenging in the Thames River*

Men could earn pennies as porters, as long as they stayed clear of the associations which had a monopoly of portage in London. Boys could hold horses' heads while the driver took a break, or sell newspapers or fast food in the streets. The 'mudlarks' of both sexes and all ages waded thigh-deep in the filthy toxic Thames mud to retrieve anything they could sell. Dogs' turds could be collected and sold to the tanneries. Discarded cigar butts could be recycled and marketed as new.

## Workhouses

When you have no prospect of a living wage, or sickness or disability or market forces prevent you from working, what are you to do?

The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 established 'workhouses' in place of the old poor houses. The Act was framed to deter undeserving applicants, and the criterion was sometimes inhumanly hard. The workhouse might deny the starving applicants even the bare shelter it provided. A 70-year-old seamstress with failing sight was told to go away and find herself some work because 'she was young enough to work'. If a family was admitted, all its members would be separated, and might never see each other again.

The workhouse itself would provide the work. The sentence of hard labour imposed on convicts was applied equally to male paupers in the 'casual ward', who were physically weak, and often unaccustomed to manual work. An experienced convict might earn 9 pence a day at stone-breaking. A clerk, reduced to the workhouse perhaps because of a gap between jobs, had to try to break granite rocks with a heavy hammer, in an open shed with no protection from frost or heat, when he had never held anything heavier than a pen. Another suitable occupation, in the eyes of the authorities, was oakum-picking: unravelling lengths of tarred rope, for use in caulking the seams of battleships. A convict's strong, thick-skinned hands could manage that; the clerk's soft fingers failed to produce the required quantities. For all this, the pauper received only an allowance of coarse bread: £4 a week if he was married, plus £2 for each child.

Workhouse food was just enough to keep the inmates from starvation. They were clothed, and even, occasionally, washed. The children were entitled to some elementary education, but this was often ignored by the workhouse keeper. There was some rudimentary medical care – interesting mainly as the first example of medical care provided by a state-funded organisation, in which one may perhaps see the germs of the National Health Service a century later.



© The Geffrye, Museum of the Home: photograph by Jayne Lloyd

In 1832 a parliamentary investigation was set up to establish the working conditions within textile factories. Read the transcript below to get an idea of the lifestyle of the Victorian poor:

Mr. Matthew Crabtree, called in; and Examined.

What age are you? — *Twenty-two.*

What is your occupation? — *A blanket manufacturer.*

Have you ever been employed in a factory? — *Yes.*

At what age did you first go to work in one? — *Eight.*

How long did you continue in that occupation? — *Four years.*

Will you state the hours of labour at the period when you first went to the factory, in ordinary times?  
— *From 6 in the morning to 8 at night.*

Fourteen hours? — *Yes.*

With what intervals for refreshment and rest? — *An hour at noon.*

When trade was brisk what were your hours? — *From 5 in the morning to 9 in the evening.*

Sixteen hours? — *Yes.*

With what intervals at dinner? — *An hour.*

How far did you live from the mill? — *About two miles.*

Was there any time allowed for you to get your breakfast in the mill? — *No.*

Did you take it before you left your home? — *Generally.*

During those long hours of labour could you be punctual; how did you awake? — *I seldom did awake spontaneously; I was most generally awoke or lifted out of bed, sometimes asleep, by my parents.*

Were you always in time? — *No.*

What was the consequence if you had been too late? — *I was most commonly beaten.*

Severely? — *Very severely, I thought.*

In those mills is chastisement towards the latter part of the day going on perpetually? — *Perpetually.*

So that you can hardly be in a mill without hearing constant crying? — *Never an hour, I believe.*

## The sweat shops

For women, there were always places in the ‘slop trade’, producing cheap mass clothing and uniforms for the forces and for prisons. The pay was pitifully low. A woman might make one shirt in a long day, sewing by hand in poor light – she had to buy her own candles – and she would be lucky to earn six shillings for a dozen. After 1856 the advent of the sewing machine improved the lot of some women, but not all had access to a machine, and the new technique required was daunting.

## Prostitution

It was no wonder that so many women took to prostitution, when the alternatives were so grim. Entire streets in the slums of London were inhabited by prostitutes. Many girls viewed a few years ‘on the game’ as a sensible way to build up a little capital to invest in a small business later, but their future was often cut short by sexually transmitted diseases. Some of the great hospitals had a few beds for them in a ‘foul ward’. They might be admitted to a ‘Lock Hospital’ which specialized in such cases. But there was no known cure for the sexually transmitted disease syphilis. Once the acute phase was over and she was discharged, a woman had no choice but to return to the streets and take up her previous life, infecting a new wave of customers. There was a ready market for young virgins. In 1885 the journalist W. T. Stead ‘bought’ – under careful supervision – a 13-year-old girl, just to show his readers how easy it was. The girl was in due course returned to her parents, still a virgin, but Stead became famous and the public could no longer ignore this shameful trade. Three years later a series of gruesome murders began in the east end of London. The victims were all prostitutes. The murderer was never discovered, but the public named him ‘Jack the Ripper’ because of his habit of eviscerating his victims.

## Wilde’s Prostitutes

In Oscar Wilde’s poem “[The Harlot’s House](#)” (1881), he appears to dehumanize the subjects of his poem; he portrays prostitutes as “strange mechanical grotesques” who are just empty and artificial “shadows.” Their existence seems almost tenuous, drifting “like black leaves wheeling in the wind.” To Wilde, these prostitutes are just “horrible marionette[s]” that are hollow, emotionless imitations of real human beings. A prostitute cannot be alive – she can only be “like a live thing.” Unlike some of the other poems that Wilde wrote in a decadent, “l’Art pour l’Art” style, “The Harlot’s House” instead carries heavy moral undertones that indicate Wilde’s strong condemnation of prostitution.



Wilde's views largely echoed, even amplified, the sentiments at the time. Though prostitution was widely frowned upon and referred to as the "Great Social Evil" in the mid-nineteenth century, it was also a taboo topic for which the "liberty of the subject [was] very jealously guarded in England," according to Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*. In fact, the subject was taboo to the point where even legislators refused and were unable to handle the issue: "the magistracy or the police [were not] allowed to enter improper or disorderly houses, unless to suppress disturbances" — they did not even have the capacity to make arrests of those distributing pornographic materials (Mayhew).

There was no well-defined legislation regarding the regulation or prohibition of prostitution, or even open discussion about such issues until 1858, when the "Chambers of the Society for the Suppression of Vice" met to discuss the issue and provide some outlines on how to manage "houses of entertainment" and the influx of foreign prostitutes into England (*The Times*, Friday Jan 15, 1858). Even after that, an editorial in *The Times* decreed that "we cannot import this offence as a crime into our Penal Code" (Thursday Feb 25, 1858). Mayhew wrote that "legislature, by refusing to interfere, ha[d] tacitly declared the existence of prostitutes to be a necessary evil" (212). Later attempts to penalize prostitution proved unsuccessful: 1766 lodgings (lodgings denoting places where prostitutes lived, not where they worked) were recorded to house prostitutes in 1857, while 1756 lodgings were recorded barely over a decade later, a very marginal decrease (Acton 7). However, the numbers are inconclusive when it comes to the prevalence of prostitution in Victorian London. Mayhew lists a range of earlier figures from 1792, half a decade before his book was published: the Bishop of Exeter claimed a figure of 80,000 in London, a police magistrate, Mr. Colquhoun concluded that there were 50,000, while the City Police put forth a figure of 7000-8000.

One doctor and writer who was particularly outspoken about the topic of prostitution was William Acton, in his book *Prostitution: Its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspects*. The book was controversial, primarily elucidating issues of morality and health regarding prostitution. Acton actually had a section dedicated to the type of brothel described by Wilde in "The Harlot's House": the dancing-room.

The visitor, on passing the doors, finds himself in a spacious room, the fittings of which are of the most costly description, while brilliant gas illuminations, reflected by numerous mirrors, impart a fairy-like aspect to the scene. The company is, of course, mixed. Many of the men resorting to such places seek no doubt the opportunity of indulging their vicious propensities; but the majority of the better class go merely to while away an idle hour. (Acton 19).

These were actually relatively well-decorated venues that were among the finest places to house prostitutes. Typically, sexual intercourse did not even take place at these sites. Instead, "the majority of the better class [went] merely to while away an idle hourÉwhere, while chatting with friends, . . . [they could] hear good music and

see pretty faces” (Acton 19). Though there were those that were there with “vicious propensities,” the majority went for reasons less explicit than sex.

Wilde describes the prostitutes in his poem as “horrible marionettes;” in contrast, Acton finds them to be “pretty and quietly, though expensively dressed.” Unlike Wilde’s descriptions of deathly-looking prostitutes, Acton finds the inhabitants of dancing-rooms to be “unaccompanied by the pallor of ill-health” — though he admits that much of it has to do with cosmetics. It is interesting that Acton remarks that the women who frequent dancing-rooms do not have the appearance of prostitutes, but look more like mistresses, suggesting that dancing-halls employed prostitutes of a higher class, beyond the common harlots shared by soldiers and sailors who had intercourse with up to 20 or 23 men in one night (5). Acton does agree somewhat with Wilde that there is little substance beyond the physical appearance of these women. They only behave quietly and have a little ability to play the piano or sing a “simple song” (19). None of the information that Acton provides seems to explain why Wilde is so adamantly in opposition to the existence of the prostitutes in dancing-hall.

This disdain for prostitutes is particularly ironic given that Wilde was later embroiled in a scandal involving male prostitutes and ultimately convicted of homosexual offenses — while married and the father of two children. The irony is striking; he berates the prostitutes “wheeling in the wind” with no loyalties in his poem, yet engaged in infidelities himself.

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<http://www.victorianweb.org/>

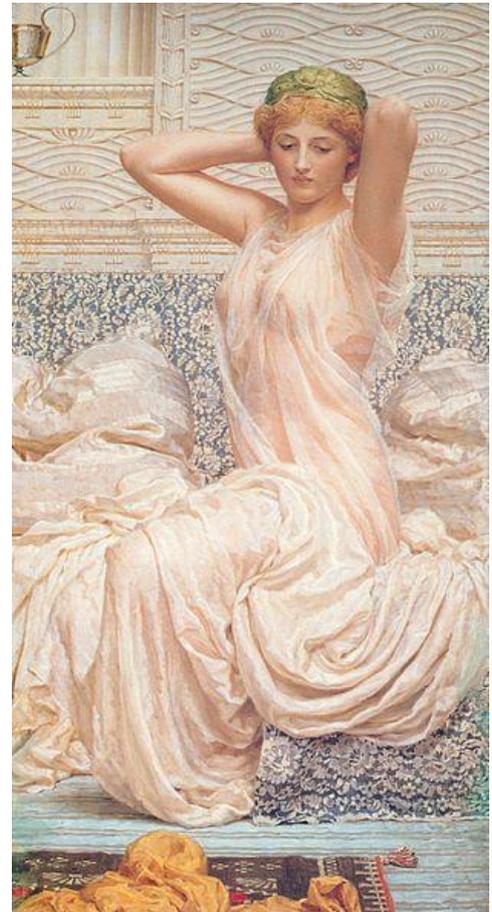
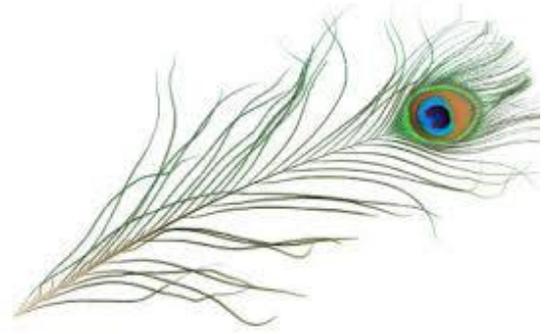
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# Aestheticism

## The Aesthetic Movement

### Fin de Siècle

The roots of Aestheticism can be traced back to the 1860's; however, it was not until the 1880's that the movement gained noticeable popularity. The Aesthetic movement is often associated with the French term "*fin de siècle*," or the "end of the century," which refers to the closing of an existing era and implies the beginning of a new one. It is often used to describe late nineteenth-century Britain, a time when the ideals of the Victorian Age (e.g. utilitarianism) were losing precedence and being replaced by Aesthetic values. The established Victorian lifestyle broke down partly because Britain's political and economic supremacy faced new challenges in the form of emerging world powers, like the United States. Essentially, the glory days of Britain's empire were coming to an end, which laid the foundation for a new, strictly anti-Victorian method of thought. **The Aesthetic movement denounced the sober morality and middle-class values that characterized the Victorian Age and embraced beauty as the chief pursuit of both art and life.**



In aestheticism the subjective view of beauty becomes the primary means of judging value: when considering whether a poem or a painting is good, aestheticism merely asks if it is **beautiful or meaningful as a work of art in itself**. This forms a stark contrast to the long-standing custom of judging art and literature either on the basis of the moral lessons it might teach to readers or viewers (its social usefulness) or in terms of its correspondence to real life (its realism). It is this **refusal to acknowledge the primacy of morality within art** that made aestheticism such a controversial movement from the mid 19th century onward: its proponents were the subjects of vituperative attacks from mainstream writers and critics and were consistently satirized throughout this period.

The movement is often considered to have ended with Oscar Wilde's trials, which began in 1895. In doing so, it cleared the path for the emergence of Modernism in the twentieth century.

## Art for Art's Sake

Aesthetic writers and artists rallied behind this slogan, first adopted by French poet Théophile Gautier, in their attempts to stress the **autonomy of art**. They felt art should be **independent from worldly issues, like politics, and should be appreciated for its own intrinsic beauty rather than for any moral purpose**. The aesthetes also refuted the idea that there was a correlation between art and the age in which it was created. In other words, art should not be interpreted as historical evidence, but rather appreciated for its own, independent history and progress. Stylistically, their work was **highly refined and appealed to the senses**. The French author, Vernon Lee, perfectly captured the aesthetes' philosophy on art when she remarked, "to appreciate a work of art means, therefore, to appreciate that work of art itself, as distinguished from appreciating something outside it, something accidentally or arbitrarily connected with it" (Evangelista 5).

## Influences

Aestheticism did not suddenly emerge independent from outside influence. Like all movements, it grew from the ideas of its predecessors and eventually developed its own unique characteristics. While many individuals influenced the aesthetes, the two most important were Walter Pater (Oscar Wilde's tutor) and Charles Baudelaire.

### Walter Pater (1839 – 1894)

In Pater's book, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (1873), Pater controversially states, "not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end." He is attempting to convey that it is the singular moment, and not the resulting effects of that moment, that is truly important. Such a statement encourages one to live in the present, and furthermore, to appreciate physical objects themselves rather than the lingering impressions of them. He feels that reflection diminishes the value of the object because our minds will focus on general aspects rather than the true beauty of the object as it existed within a distinct and fleeting moment. The aesthetes embraced Pater's theories as a means of understanding the supremacy of beauty over morality and the present over longevity.

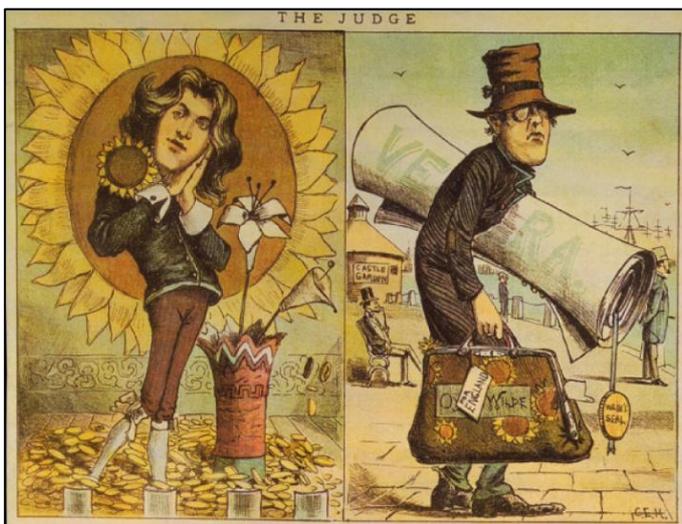
### Charles Baudelaire (1821 – 1867)

Baudelaire was a French poet who is generally considered to be the fore-runner of the French symbolists, a movement which held numerous parallels to British Aestheticism. Baudelaire's poetry exhibited many qualities that the aesthetes would later adopt. For instance, Baudelaire was one of the first writers to include sexually explicit material within his poems, as some of his subjects were lesbians and vampires. The aesthetes, following his example, continued to push back the boundaries, which enclosed sexuality, within their own work. They also gained from

Baudelaire an intense desire for sensuality and a need to understand the relationship between art and life.

In his poem “Harmonie du Soir”, Baudelaire appeals to the senses with his description of fragrance within the air, and furthermore, equates life to art when he implies that the body is like a violin (Chai 48-62). Oscar Wilde, an aesthetic writer, would further develop this supposed relationship between art and life. In his essay, "[The Decay of Lying: An Observation](#)" (1891), Wilde claims that **"Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life."** He is essentially arguing that art is superior to life because life relies on art as a means of finding expression and beauty. This notion, which was built upon the foundation of Baudelaire's ideas, would eventually become a major part of aesthetic doctrine.

*Sunflowers were the most popular Aesthetic motif. With its bold colour and simple flat shape the flower had great appeal for Aesthetes.*



*“Aesthetics are higher than ethics. They belong to a more spiritual sphere. To discern the beauty of a thing is the finest point to which we can arrive. Even colour-sense is more important, in the development of the individual, than a sense of right and wrong.”*

Oscar Wilde



## Hellenism\*, Hedonism, and Aestheticism

\*study or imitation of ancient Greek culture

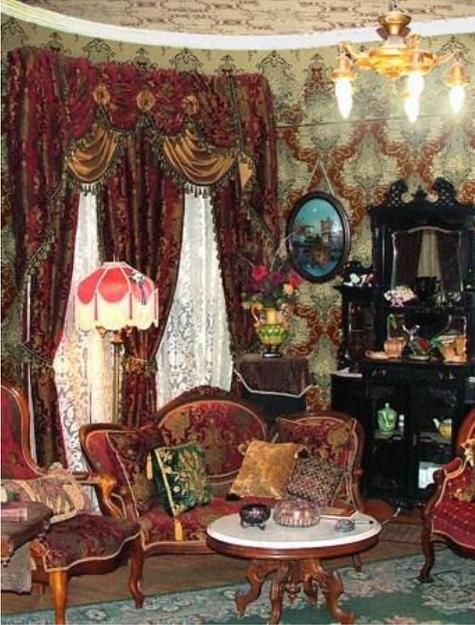
The shift in focus from Latin to Greek during the Victorian era had a profound impact on British society. Initially, the field of Greek studies belonged to scholars and politicians, and stressed morality; however, it was the aesthetes who transformed the field into one of dissent. They did so by reestablishing the Greek concept of **hedonism** (a term derived from the Greek word for 'pleasure'), or **the pursuit of pleasure and beauty, as the purpose of life**. As a result, the aesthetes became infamous for their habits of passion and excess, in the forms of sensuality and sexuality. They refuted the strict morality of the age, which was based on Christian principles (Damrosch 1939); instead the aesthetes opted to follow the philosophies of the pagan Greeks. This breakdown in conventional moral conviction among the aesthetes led to the frequent association of "**decadence**" with Aestheticism.

It is also important to note that Victorian England was an age of scientific development and more specifically, one in which the ideas of Charles Darwin flourished. Science is often viewed as a threat to art, as its developments are practical and art's are largely abstract. If a society makes a significant shift towards the sciences, there is a chance that the arts will be neglected or made inferior. Consequently, one author notes that the aesthetes praised Greece as a prime example of a culture that was able to secure a place for art within a scientific age, and furthermore, sought to emulate their example. This is not to say that the aesthetes were adverse to scientific innovation. They too favored the "triumph" of scientific progress over superstition and the "dream-world of Christianity".



*Aesthetic style furniture often displays an Eastern influence, and the prominent use of nature—especially flowers, birds, ginkgo leaves, and peacock feathers.*





## The Aesthetic Lifestyle

The aesthetes' commitment to their theories and beliefs was so strong that eventually aestheticism transcended the boundaries of art and became a way of life. This meant that an aesthete was not only confirmed as such by his work, but also by his behavior. For example, one could typically pick out an aesthete simply by his word choice. They tended to use exaggerated metaphors and superlative adjectives, like "supreme, consummate, utter, and preciously sublime" (Damrosch 1939). Essentially, components of aesthetic ideology can be seen in the way the aesthetes approached fashion, sexuality, and alcohol/drugs.

## Dandyism



Dandyism, to some extent, has always existed. In general, a dandy is one who pays particular attention to his own personal appearance. Their dress is often eccentric, yet elegant. Specific to late-Victorian England, to be a dandy meant to also elevate the artificial over the natural. The opening lines of Oscar Wilde's ["Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young"](#) (1894) state, "The first duty in life is to be as artificial as possible." One example of their attraction to artificiality is that they preferred urban, rather than rural, settings and were particularly enamored with London (Jackson 132). Furthermore, Victorian dandies aimed to uphold a high level of sophistication and valued wit as a measure of such. Many aesthetic writers were well-known dandies, such as Oscar Wilde, Algernon Charles Swinburne, and Walter Pater.

## Sexuality

In 1885 Britain's Parliament outlawed homosexuality with the Labouchere Amendment. Males caught engaging in any type of sexual activity with another male could be sentenced to up to two years in prison. Despite this law, the late-Victorian period saw an increased interest in the exploration of sexuality. Not only were gender distinctions increasingly blurred, but the presence of homoerotic desires became more and more obvious within the public sphere. In fact, it was during this period that the words "homosexual" and "lesbian" were first used.

The aesthetes were both products and propagators of these new liberal attitudes towards sexuality. Deborah Lutz claims that "Something of the erotic always lurks about the Aesthete: he faints with love; he luxuriates in exotic decadence; he tends even towards the perverse. He quivers, he throbs with the pure ecstasy of life, with the exquisiteness of his own experience" (Fox 247). Many aesthetes are known to have been either homosexuals or interested in homoeroticism, which can be partly attributed to their fondness of Greek culture. Since the Greeks allowed male to male love and even encouraged it as an acceptable source of pleasure, the concept of homosexuality appears frequently in their art and literature. Many aesthetes saw the Greek example as a justification for their own homoeroticism and felt that such desires were "inseparable from [their] artistic and intellectual activities" (Evangelista 19).

However, it was more than just a connection to the past that led the artists of this movement to embrace sexual deviance. The aesthetes were fiercely individualistic, and as a result, opposed anything mainstream. They developed a love of "shocking" the middle classes with both their art and lifestyles (Jackson 152). Therefore, they created sexually suggestive pieces of work and adopted liberal sexual attitudes, both of which opposed the Victorian sense of morality.

Furthermore, the combination of this desire to shock the conservative minded with their need to live within the present moment, led to the development of many habits which were considered to be vices. Aesthetes were generally seen as heavy consumers of alcohol, particularly absinthe, and were fascinated with drugs like opium and hashish, all of which granted them a greater intensity of sensation (Jackson 153).

Though not all of the aesthetic artists developed these habits the death of many of them at a young age suggests that the habits were fairly prevalent. For example, Wilde died at forty, Aubrey Beardsley at twenty-six, and Ernest Dowson at thirty-three, among others. Jackson clearly summarizes this notion: "It would seem as if these restless and tragic figures thirsted so much for life, and for the life of the hour, that they put the cup to their lips and drained it in one deep draught..." (158).



"...Lord Henry speaks 'languidly' three times and 'languorously' once".

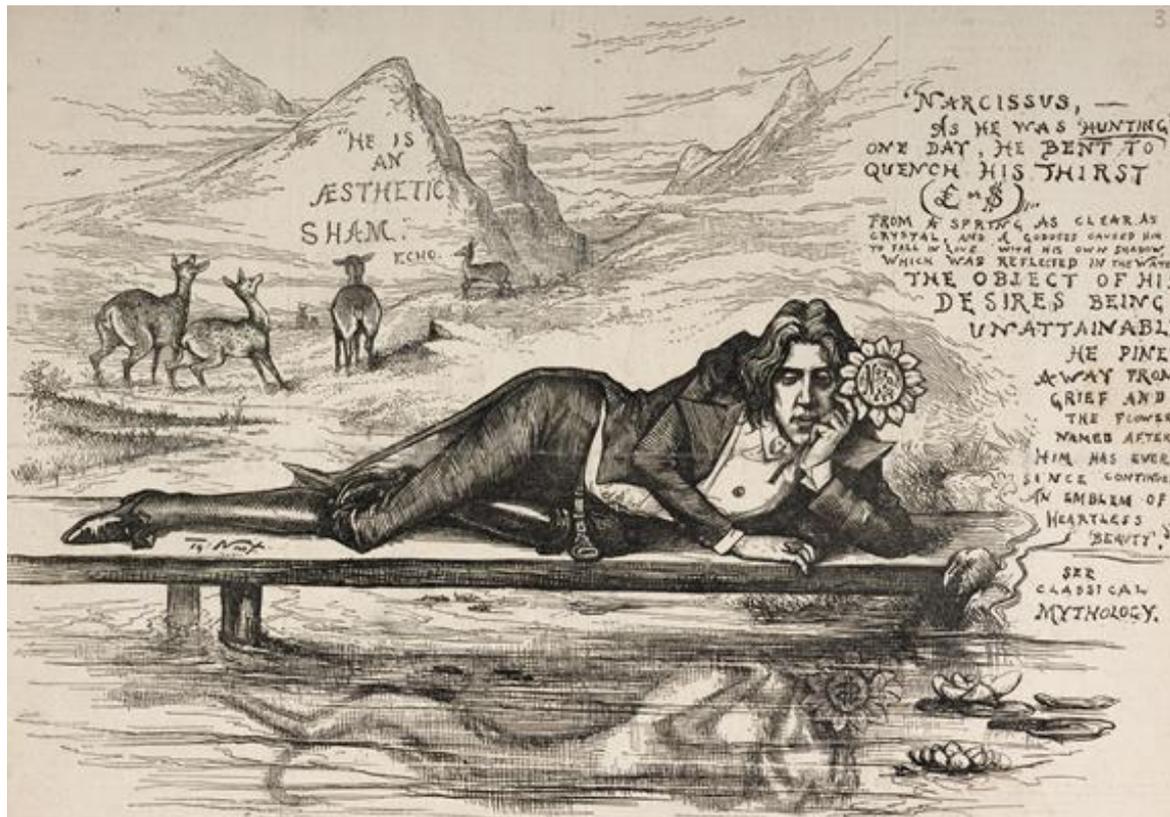
*Ellman, describing the Aestheticism in Dorian Gray.*

"I can't describe action: my people sit in chairs and chatter".

*Oscar Wilde commenting on his novel.*

"...we live in an age when unnecessary things are our only necessities". *Dorian Gray's thoughts.*

*We can describe Lord Henry (as well as Oscar Wilde) as a **lounge lizard**- an idle man who spends his time in places frequented by rich and fashionable people.*

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**Additional reading/watching:**

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/mar/26/aestheticism-exhibition-victoria-albert-museum>

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/s/style-guide-aestheticism/>

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<https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/p/the-picture-of-dorian-gray/critical-essays/oscar-wildes-aesthetics>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8eRNALD1omk>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8kJTl7FFJE>

## The Origins of the Gothic

The Goths were a northern Germanic tribe, one of many so-called "barbarian" pagan tribes which invaded former territories of the Christian Roman Empire following the fall of Rome in the 4th century A.D. These waves of invaders, who were absorbed by Christianity, brought an architectural and artistic sensibility which was very distinctive from the Classical or Greco-Roman style. Whereas the [Greco-Roman style](#) was subtle and controlled, the [Gothic style](#) was extreme, seemingly uncontrolled, larger than life, intended to invoke a strong emotional response, whether awe, pity, compassion, horror or fear. The Classical style was naturalistic and idealistic, while the Gothic style was crude, caricature-like, grotesque and exaggerated.



*Greco-Roman Style Architecture*



*Gothic Style Architecture*

Gothic literature arose as an opposition to the mechanization of modern lifestyle of the Industrial Revolution during the eighteenth century and Gothicism came to be associated with the "barbaric", which stood in opposition to the "classical" (Punter and Byron 7). **Imagery from the genre thus poses a threat to the process of socialization, and institutionalization.**

Punter and Byron explain that:

*Where the classical was well-ordered, the Gothic was chaotic; where the classical was simple and pure, Gothic was ornate and convoluted; where the classics offered a world of clear rules and limits, Gothic represented excess and exaggeration, the product of the wild and the uncivilized, a world that constantly tended to overflow cultural boundaries. (7)*

Gothic fiction began as a sophisticated joke. Horace Walpole first applied the word 'Gothic' to a novel in the subtitle – 'A Gothic Story' – of *The Castle of Otranto*, published in 1764. When he used the word it meant something like 'barbarous', as well as 'deriving from the Middle Ages'. Walpole pretended that the story itself was an antique relic, providing a preface in which a translator claims to have discovered the tale, published in Italian in 1529, 'in the library of an ancient catholic family in

the north of England'. The story itself, 'founded on truth', was written three or four centuries earlier still (Preface). Some readers were duly deceived by this fiction and aggrieved when it was revealed to be a modern 'fake'.

The novel itself tells a supernatural tale in which Manfred, the gloomy Prince of Otranto, develops an irresistible passion for the beautiful young woman who was to have married his son and heir. The novel opens memorably with this son being crushed to death by the huge helmet from a statue of a previous Prince of Otranto, and throughout the novel the very fabric of the castle comes to supernatural life until villainy is defeated. Walpole, who made his own house at Strawberry Hill into a mock-Gothic building, had discovered a fictional territory that has been exploited ever since. Gothic involves the supernatural (or the promise of the supernatural), it often involves the discovery of mysterious elements of antiquity, and it usually takes its protagonists into strange or frightening old buildings.

### **The Mysteries of Udolpho**



In the 1790s, novelists rediscovered what Walpole had imagined. The doyenne of Gothic novelists was Ann Radcliffe, and her most famous novel, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) took its title from the name of a fictional Italian castle where much of the action is set. Like Walpole, she created a brooding aristocratic villain, Montoni, to threaten her resourceful virgin heroine Emily with an unspeakable fate. All of Radcliffe's novels are set in foreign lands, often with lengthy descriptions of sublime scenery. *Udolpho* is set amongst the dark and looming Apennine Mountains – Radcliffe derived her settings from travel books. On the title

page of most of her novels was the description that was far more common than the word 'gothic': her usual subtitle was 'A Romance'. Other Gothic novelists of the period used the same word for their tales, advertising their supernatural thrills. A publishing company, Minerva Press, grew up simply to provide an eager public with this new kind of fiction.

### **Northanger Abbey**

Radcliffe's fiction was the natural target for Jane Austen's satire in *Northanger Abbey*. The book's novel-loving heroine, Catherine Morland, imposes on reality the Gothic plots with which she is familiar. In fact, Radcliffe's mysteries all turn out to have natural, if complicated, explanations. Some critics, like Coleridge, complained about her timidity in this respect. Yet she had made a discovery: 'gothic' truly came alive in the thoughts and anxieties of her characters. Gothic has always been more about fear of the supernatural than the supernatural itself. Other Gothic novelists were less circumspect than Radcliffe. Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), was an experiment in how outrageous a Gothic novelist can be. After a parade of ghosts, demons and sexually inflamed monks, it has a final guest appearance by Satan himself.

## Frankenstein and the double

A second wave of Gothic novels in the second and third decades of the 19th century established new conventions. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) gave a scientific form to the supernatural formula. Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) featured a Byronic anti-hero who had sold his soul for a prolonged life. And James Hogg's elaborately titled *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) is the story of a man pursued by his own double. A character's sense of encountering a double of him- or herself, also essential to *Frankenstein*, was established as a powerful new Gothic motif. **The Gothic double is an expression of the darker desires within a character; the motif embodies all that which has no space in the social sphere.** Doubles crop up throughout Gothic fiction, the most famous example being the late 19th-century Gothic novella, Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Where does this motif appear in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*?



This motif is one of the reasons why Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny (or *unheimlich*, as it is in German) is often applied to Gothic fiction. In his 1919 paper on 'The Uncanny' Freud drew his examples from the Gothic tales of E T A Hoffmann in order to account for the special feeling of disquiet – the sense of the uncanny – that they aroused. He argued that the making strange of what should be familiar is essential to this, and that it is disturbing and fascinating because it recalls us to our original infantile separation from or origin in the womb.

## Extreme psychological states and horror

Another writer who commonly exploited doubles in his Gothic tales was the American Edgar Allan Poe. He used many of the standard properties of Gothic (medieval settings, castles and ancient houses, aristocratic corruption) but turned these into an exploration of extreme psychological states. He was attracted to the genre because he was fascinated by fear. In his hands Gothic was becoming 'horror', a term properly applied to the most famous late-Victorian example of Gothic, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. The opening section of *Dracula* uses some familiar Gothic properties: the castle whose chambers contain the mystery that the protagonist must solve; the sublime scenery that emphasises his isolation. Stoker learned from the vampire stories that had appeared earlier in the 19th century and exploited the narrative methods of Wilkie Collins's 'sensation fiction'. *Dracula* is written in the form of journal entries and letters by various



characters, caught up in the horror of events. The fear and uncertainty on which Gothic had always relied is enacted in the narration.

### The Gothic in mainstream Victorian fiction



Meanwhile Gothic had become so influential that we can detect its elements in much mainstream Victorian fiction. Both Emily and Charlotte Brontë included intimations of the supernatural within narratives that were otherwise attentive to the realities of time, place and material constraint. In the opening episode of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, the narrator, Lockwood, has to stay the night at Heathcliff's house because of heavy snow. He finds Cathy's diary, written as a child, and nods off while reading it. There follows a powerfully narrated nightmare in which an icy hand reaches to him through the window and the voice of Catherine Linton calls to be let in. The vision seems to prefigure what he will later discover about the history of Cathy and Heathcliff. Half in jest, Lockwood tells Heathcliff that *Wuthering Heights* is haunted; the novel, centred as it is on a house, seems to exploit in a new way the Gothic idea that entering an old building means entering the stories of those who have lived in it before.



Two of Charlotte Brontë's novels, *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, feature old buildings that appear to be haunted. As in the Gothic fiction of Ann Radcliffe, the apparition seen by Jane Eyre in Thornfield Hall, where she is a governess, and the ghostly nun glimpsed

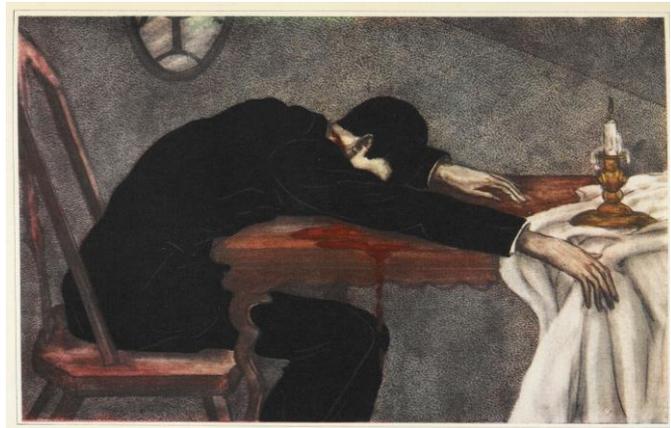


by Lucy Snowe in the attic of the old Pensionnat where she teaches, have rational explanations. But Charlotte Brontë likes to raise the fears of her protagonists as to the presence of the supernatural, as if they were latterday Gothic heroines. Gothic still provides the vocabulary of apprehensiveness. Similarly, Wilkie Collins may have introduced into fiction, as Henry James said, 'those most mysterious of mysteries, the mysteries which are at our own doors', but he liked his reminders of traditional Gothic plots. In *The Woman in White*, all events turn out to be humanly contrived, yet the sudden appearance to the night-time walker of the figure of 'a solitary Woman, dressed from head to foot in white garments' haunts the reader as it does the narrator, Walter Hartright (ch. 4). *The Moonstone* is a detective story with a scientific explanation, but we never forget the legend that surrounds the diamond of the title, and the curse on those who steal it – a curse that seems to come true. The

final triumph of Gothic is to become, as in these examples, a vital thread within novels that otherwise take pains to convince us of what is probable and rational.

### Elements of the Gothic Novel

1. Setting in a castle
2. An atmosphere of mystery and suspense
3. An ancient prophecy
4. Omens, portents, visions
5. Supernatural or otherwise inexplicable events
6. High, even overwrought emotion
7. Women in distress
8. Women threatened by a powerful, impulsive, tyrannical male
9. A setting of gloom and horror



The following all suggest some element of mystery, danger, or the supernatural.

wind, especially howling	rain, especially blowing
doors grating on rusty hinges	sighs, moans, howls, eerie sounds
footsteps approaching	clanking chains
lights in abandoned rooms	gusts of wind blowing out lights
characters trapped in a room	doors suddenly slamming shut
ruins of buildings	baying of distant dogs or wolves
thunder and lightning	crazed laughter

### 10. The vocabulary of the gothic

Here as an example are some of the words (in several categories) that help make up the vocabulary of the gothic in *The Castle of Otranto*:

Mystery	diabolical, enchantment, ghost, goblins, haunted, infernal, magic, magician, miracle, necromancer, omens, ominous, portent, preternatural, prodigy, prophecy, secret, sorcerer, spectre, spirits, strangeness, talisman, vision
Fear, Terror, or Sorrow	afflicted, affliction, agony, anguish, apprehensions, apprehensive, commiseration, concern, despair, dismal, dismay, dread, dreaded, dreading, fearing, frantic, fright, frightened, grief, hopeless, horrid, horror, lamentable, melancholy, miserable, mournfully, panic, sadly, scared, shrieks, sorrow, sympathy, tears, terrible, terrified, terror, unhappy, wretched
Surprise	alarm, amazement, astonished, astonishment, shocking, staring, surprise, surprised, thunderstruck, wonder
Haste	anxious, breathless, flight, frantic, hastened, hastily, impatience, impatient, impatiently, impetuosity, precipitately, running, sudden, suddenly
Anger	anger, angrily, cholera, enraged, furious, fury, incense, incensed, provoked, rage, raving, resentment, temper, wrath, wrathful, wrathfully
Largeness	enormous, gigantic, giant, large, tremendous, vast
Darkness	dark, darkness, dismal, shaded, black, night

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## Greek Mythology: Echo and Narcissus



In Greek mythology Echo was a wood nymph who loved a youth by the name of Narcissus. He was a beautiful creature loved by many but Narcissus loved no one. He enjoyed attention, praise and envy. In Narcissus' eyes nobody matched him and as such he considered none were worthy of him.

Echo's passion for Narcissus was equalled only by her passion for talking as she always had to have the last word. One day she enabled the escape of the goddess Juno's adulterous husband by engaging Juno in conversation. On finding out Echo's treachery Juno cursed Echo by removing her voice with the exception that she could only speak that which was spoken to her.

Echo often waited in the woods to see Narcissus hoping for a chance to be noticed. One day as she lingered in the bushes he heard her footsteps and called out "Who's here?" Echo replied, "Here!" Narcissus called again, "Come". Echo replied "Come!" Narcissus called once more "Why do you shun me? Let us join one another." Echo was overjoyed that Narcissus had asked her to join him. She longed to tell him who she was and of all the love she had for him in her heart but she could not speak. She ran towards him and threw herself upon him.

Narcissus became angry. "Hands off! I would rather die than you should have me!" He threw Echo to the ground. Echo left the woods a ruin, her heart broken. Ashamed, she ran away to live in the mountains yearning for a love that would never be returned. The grief killed her. Her body became one with the mountain stone. All that remained was her voice which replied in kind when others spoke.

Narcissus continued to attract many nymphs, all of whom he briefly entertained before scorning and refusing them. The gods grew tired of his behaviour and cursed Narcissus. They wanted him to know what it felt like to love and never be loved. They

made it so there was only one whom he would love, someone who was not real and could never love him back.

One day whilst out enjoying the sunshine Narcissus came upon a pool of water. As he gazed into it he caught a glimpse of what he thought was a beautiful water spirit. He did not recognise his own reflection and was immediately enamoured. Narcissus bent down his head to kiss the vision. As he did so the reflection mimicked his actions. Taking this as a sign of reciprocation Narcissus reached into the pool to draw the water spirit to him. The water displaced and the vision was gone. He panicked, where had his love gone? When the water became calm the water spirit returned. "Why, beautiful being, do you shun me? Surely my face is not one to repel you. The nymphs love me, and you yourself look not indifferent upon me. When I stretch forth my arms you do the same; and you smile upon me and answer my beckonings with the like." Again he reached out and again his love disappeared. Frightened to touch the water Narcissus lay still by the pool gazing in to the eyes of his vision.

He cried in frustration. As he did so Echo also cried. He did not move, he did not eat or drink, he only suffered. As he pined he became gaunt losing his beauty. The nymphs that loved him pleaded with him to come away from the pool. As they did so Echo also pleaded with him. He was transfixed; he wanted to stay there forever. Narcissus like Echo died with grief. His body disappeared and where his body once lay a flower grew in its place. The nymphs mourned his death and as they mourned Echo also mourned.



## Dorian Gray and Narcissus

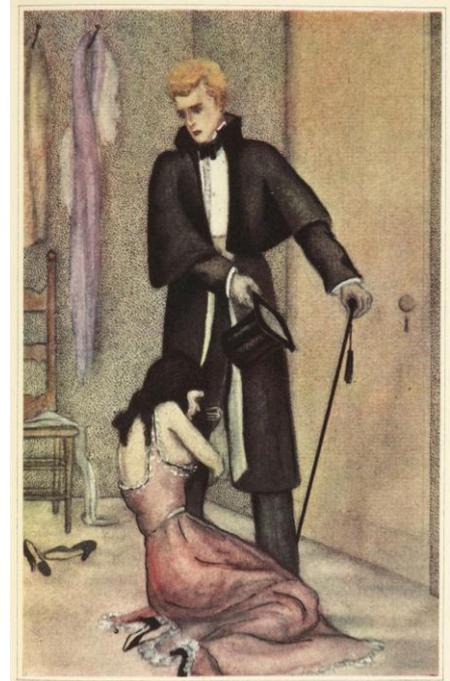
In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, there are at least four specific references to Narcissus (pp. 3, 105, 114, & 128). The myth of him and Echo reveals a further facet of Dorian's encounter with Sibyl Vane. Ovid's portrait of Echo represents one of the earliest and most powerfully conveyed examples of unrestrained female sexuality in literature:

*Now when she saw Narcissus wandering through the fields, she was inflamed with love and followed him by stealth; the more she followed, the more she burned by a nearer flame; as when quick-burning sulphur, smeared round the tops of torches, catches fire from another fire brought near. Oh, how often does she long to approach him with alluring words and make soft prayers to him. [1977, p. 151]*

Sibyl experiences love as just such an inner fire. She greets Dorian after her "ridiculous" performance: "Her eyes were lit with an exquisite fire. There was a radiance about her" (p. 85). She begs him to take her away with him where they can be alone, away from the world of the theatre: "I might mimic a passion that I do not feel, but I cannot mimic one that burns me like fire" (p. 86).

Like Narcissus, Dorian is "pale, proud, and indifferent" to Sibyl's love (p. 84). He treats her equally cruelly: "You simply produce no effect," he tells her. Echo pines away for love of Narcissus. Sibyl commits suicide for love of Dorian. Just as Narcissus cannot gain the thing he loves (his own reflection), so Dorian is punished with "mad hungers" that grow more ravenous the more he feeds them (p. 128). Narcissus is infatuated by his own too muchness, just as Dorian grows "more and more enamoured of his own beauty" (p. 128). Narcissus eventually seeks release from his body, and wishes his reflection longer life:

*Oh, that I might be parted from my own body! And, strange prayer for a lover, I would that what I love were absent from me! ... Death is nothing to me, for in death I shall leave my troubles; and I would he that is loved might live longer; but as it is, we too shall die together in one breath. (1977, p. 157)*



Dorian also separates himself from himself, and confines one aspect of himself to his old school-room. He too eventually seeks release from the condition which he had prayed to be allowed to enjoy. He too feels a strange pity for his other self: "A sense of infinite pity, not for himself, but for the painted image of himself, came over him" (p. 91). The parallel is confirmed by something Dorian says towards the end of the novel:



*"I wish I could love, ... But I seem to have lost the passion, and forgotten the desire. I am too much concentrated on myself." (p. 205)*

Thus, both Echo and Sibyl represent images of the feminine endeavouring to waken their respective male protagonists to eros — that is, relationship through sexual commitment.

Narcissus and Dorian represent a protagonist unable to relate to such an [image](#) of the feminine.

Sources:

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## The Faustian Bargain

Would you be willing to sacrifice your soul to the devil in exchange for anything you've ever dreamed or desired?



The Faustian Bargain is a deal with the devil, a pact with Satan - you can have anything you've ever wanted. And in exchange for extreme wealth or power (or eternal youth!), all you have to do is hand your soul over to the devil for eternity. The popular **theme** of the **Faustian bargain** started in folktales but its stories are still told in popular films, music, comic strips, books and television programs today.

### Origins

The legend started in a German folktale hundreds of years ago. The tale was about a man named **Faust**. The story was originally told to warn Christians that God has set human limits and a righteous man must respect those limits or suffer through eternal damnation.

There are many different versions of the story, but the main framework remains more or less the same. Faust was an intelligent and successful scholar, but he wanted more out of the life; he was bored with the limited nature of human knowledge. So he decided that it would be a good idea to call the devil and ask him for supreme knowledge and power so he could enjoy all the pleasures that the world had to offer.



In response to his request, the devil sends his right-hand man Mephistopheles, who offers Faust a deal. He can have supreme knowledge and power for 24 years, but in exchange, the devil wants Faust's soul where it will then spend eternity in hell. Faust accepts the bargain and signs his fate with blood.

Faust goes about enjoying his new found knowledge and power. He seduces women, he becomes a young man, he travels the world, he summons spirits and with every step he gains more knowledge and more power. His experiences are limitless; he enjoys everything that the world can possibly give him.

And at the end of the term, Faust waits for the devil; he knows his time is up. The devil carries his spirit off to hell and the story is over. However, it should be noted that in some tales, Faust outsmarts the devil or develops a plan to get out of the deal.

### **Faustian Bargain as Metaphor**

The idea of selling your soul to the devil has become a **metaphor** for getting something you want in exchange for sacrificing something great. Often times it's something intangible, like your morals or self-esteem. So let's say that I really wanted to get an A on a final exam. The grade would make me valedictorian of my class and ensure my acceptance into Harvard University. It's all I've ever wanted in life. And let's also say that I found out that I could somehow obtain a copy of the exam ahead of time.

Yes, if I did see the exam beforehand, I would get an A and all my dreams would come true. But the Faustian bargain would be that I would become a cheater. It would mean that I didn't earn the rewards myself. In turn, I would sacrifice my morals and ethics, and I would never be able to turn back. I would always be a cheater.

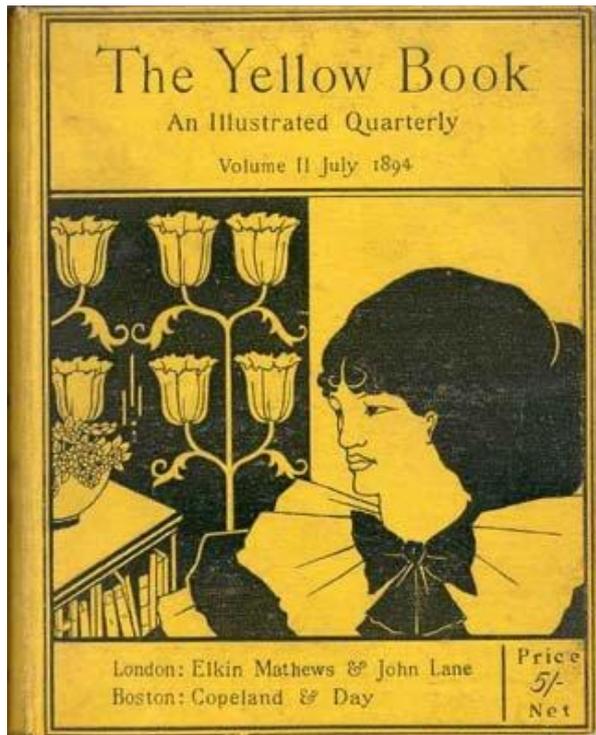


*What is worth the price of your soul?*

*Fame? Money? Success? Beauty?*

Source: <https://study.com/academy/lesson/faustian-bargain-definition-lesson-quiz.html>

## The Yellow Book



This is likely to be a reference to J.K. Huysmans' *À Rebours* ("Against Nature"), an incredibly important novel of the Decadent period (illicit French novels were wrapped in yellow paper to alert the reader to their lascivious content). In both the original text and Wilde's summary of it, its incredibly wealthy protagonist devotes his life to seeking as many aesthetic sensations as he can, regardless of what society says.

This protagonist is a representation of what Dorian could become—a robotic being with no true emotions and no true relationships—looking for only the next new sensation:

*One hardly knew at times whether one was reading the spiritual ecstasies of some mediaeval saint or the morbid confessions of a modern*

*sinner. It was a poisonous book. The heavy odour of incense seemed to cling about its pages and to trouble the brain. The mere cadence of the sentences, the subtle monotony of their music, so full as it was of complex refrains and movements elaborately repeated, produced in the mind of the lad, as he passed from chapter to chapter, a form of reverie, a malady of dreaming, that made him unconscious of the falling day and creeping shadows.*

Upon reading it, Dorian sees aspects of his own life reflected back at him in this character's life. However, Wilde made some notable changes (like the explicit mention of the protagonist's lost beauty, which just makes Dorian even more scared that he'll lose his looks) to make it more fitting to his novel.

Most importantly, the yellow book represents the "poisonous" influence Lord Henry has on Dorian; Henry gives the book to Dorian as a kind of experiment, and it works horrifyingly well:

*There was a horrible fascination in them all. He saw them at night, and they troubled his imagination in the day. The Renaissance knew of strange manners of poisoning -- poisoning by a helmet and a lighted torch, by an embroidered glove and a jewelled fan, by a gilded pomander and by an amber chain. **Dorian Gray had been poisoned by a book.** There were moments when he looked on evil simply as a mode through which he could realize his conception of the beautiful.*

Its **hedonistic, decadent message** makes it a kind of guide book for Dorian, who lives his whole life in pursuit of its ideals.

Ultimately, as we're reminded, it's Lord Henry's fault for poisoning Dorian with the book, which comes to stand in for all of Henry's extravagant, selfish, dangerously seductive philosophical ideas.

## Imagery

### Mirrors



### Masks



## Shadows



## Beautiful Objects



## Disease



## White and Red



## Character Sketches

### Dorian Gray



#### Biographical Information

#### Adjectives I can use to describe this character:

#### Important Quotations:

#### General Notes:

## Lord Henry Wotton



### Biographical Information

### Adjectives I can use to describe this character:

### Important Quotations:

### General Notes:

## Basil Hallward



### Biographical Information

**Adjectives I can use to describe this character:**

**Important Quotations:**

**General Notes:**

## Sybil Vane



### Biographical Information

### Adjectives I can use to describe this character:

### Important Quotations:

### General Notes:

## James Vane



### Biographical Information

**Adjectives I can use to describe this character:**

**Important Quotations:**

**General Notes:**

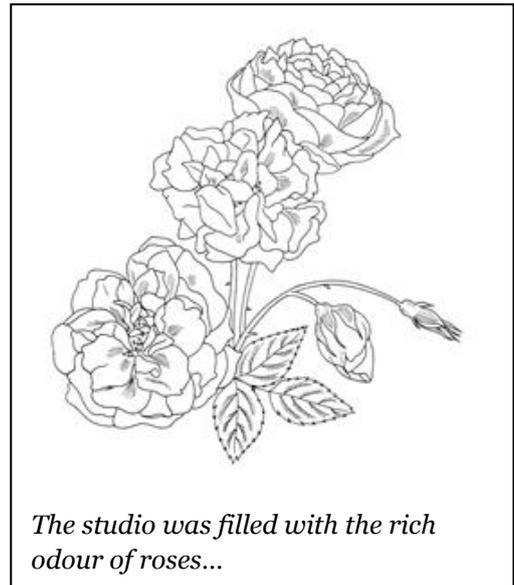
### Other Characters

<b>Character</b>	<b>Notes</b>

## Chapter Questions

### Chapter One

1. Reread the first three paragraphs of this chapter. How is the novel's opening typical of Aestheticism?
- 2.1 What is the first description we are given of (the image of) Dorian Gray?
- 2.2 What is the significance of this description?
3. On page 7, we read of Basil, the artist, "whose sudden disappearance some years ago caused, at the time, some public excitement." This is an example of foreshadowing. What future event might be hinted at here?
4. On Page 7, Lord Henry states, "You must certainly send it next year to Grosvenor. The Academy is too large and too vulgar. Whenever I have gone there, there have been either so many people that I have not been able to see the pictures, which was dreadful, or so many pictures that I have not been able to see the people, which was worse."
- 4.1 This is one example of Lord Henry's many witty, cynical, paradoxical aphorisms. What is an aphorism?
- 4.2 What attitude towards art does Lord Henry demonstrate here?
5. Refer to page 8. Basil states, "...but I really can't exhibit it. I have put too much of myself into it."
- 5.1 Quote a line from Pg 11 in which Basil makes a similar confession.
- 5.2 Which of Wilde's aphorisms, given in his preface, has Basil ignored?
- 5.3 What might Basil have revealed in the portrait?
6. Lord Henry describes Dorian as "made out of ivory and rose-leaves [petals]" (Pg 8). As you read the novel, look out for descriptions of Dorian in the colours of white and red. Of what are these colours symbolic?
7. How does Lord Henry describe his relationship with his wife?



8. Basil says to Lord Henry: “You never say a moral thing, and you never do a wrong thing. Your cynicism is simply a pose” (Pg 10).  
For what you know of the events that are going to transpire, do you think this is an accurate assessment of Lord Henry?
9. Refer to Pg 12: “Yes, she is a peacock in everything but beauty, said Lord Henry, pulling the daisy to bits with his long, nervous fingers.” Comment on the symbolism of Lord Henry’s actions.
10. Basil tells Lord Henry that Dorian “has suggested to me an entirely new manner in art, an entirely new manner of style. I see things differently, I think of them differently. I can now recreate life in a way that was hidden from me before.” Comment on significance of the influence that art has had on Basil’s life.
11. Why does Basil not want to introduce Lord Henry to Dorian?



*In the centre of the room, clamped to an upright easel, stood the full-length portrait of a young man of extraordinary personal beauty...*

## Chapter Two

1. Discuss the impact of introducing Dorian to readers at this stage in the novel.
2. Refer to Lord Henry’s first sight of Dorian: “Yes, he was wonderfully handsome, with this finely-curved scarlet lips, his frank blue eyes, his crisp gold hair. There was something in his face that made one trust him at once. All the candour of youth was there, as well as all youth’s passionate beauty. No wonder Basil Hallward worshipped him” (Pg 23).  
  
What do you notice about the relationship Lord Henry draws between Dorian’s appearance, and his character?
3. Refer to the passage on Pg 25: “Because to influence a person ... And yet –”
  - 3.1 What influence does social norm have on an individual, according to Lord Henry?
  - 3.2 What one word is used to describe a person like Lord Henry, who indulges in sensual pleasures as an exercise in individuality and freedom?

4. Explain Lord Henry's aphorism that "The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it" (Pg 26).
5. How does Dorian respond to Lord Henry's suggestion to resist social expectation and norm, and yield to temptation?
6. What does Lord Henry mean when he says, "Nothing can cure the soul but the senses, just as nothing can cure the senses but the soul" (Pg 28)?
7. Refer to page 33: "How sad it is! I shall grow old, and horrible, and dreadful. But this picture will remain always young. It will never be older than this particular day in June..."  
How has Dorian changed under Lord Henry's influence?
8. Copy out the passage (it's just a few lines) in which Dorian makes a Faustian Bargain.
 

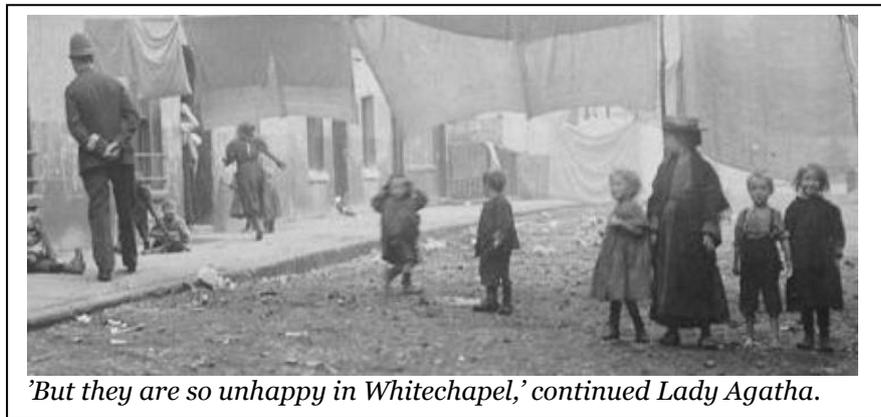
NB- This is a very important passage and you need to know it well. Learn it off by heart, sing it to your bff, get it tattooed on your ankle- do whatever it takes!
9. Find a quote that demonstrates that Dorian has merged Life with Art, and that his life and fate are now bound to the painting.

### Chapter Three

1. This chapter was not included in Wilde's original Lippincott's publication of the novel. He wrote it in after the largely critical response he received.  
  
The chapter does not push the plot forward in any way- it contains no pivotal moments which change the course of the story. Why do you think Wilde included it in his second edited version of the novel?
2. Refer to Lord Fermor's (Lord Henry's uncles') statement on pg. 41: "Examinations, sir are pure humbug from beginning to end. If a man is a gentleman, he knows quite enough, and if he is not a gentleman, whatever he knows is bad for him."  
Why would Lord Fermor be so irritated by examinations?
3. What does Lord Henry discover about Dorian's family history?

4. What does Lord Henry mean, when he thinks, “Yes; he would try to be to Dorian Gray what, without knowing it, the lad was to the painter who had fashioned the wonderful portrait” (Pg 45-46)?
5. What do we learn about the East End of London?  
(Note- Curzon Street etc are in the West End. Pay attention to the symbolism of the divide, and how it relates to the duality we witness in Dorian)
6. Refer to Aunt Agatha’s words to Lord Henry, on pg 48 - 49: “Oh! Harry, I am quite vexed with you. Why do you try to persuade our nice Mr Dorian Gray to give up the East End? I assure you he would be quite invaluable. They would love his playing”.

What is ironic about Aunt Agatha’s words?



*'But they are so unhappy in Whitechapel,' continued Lady Agatha.*

7. Describe the effect that having an audience has on Lord Henry.  
(Remember- Wilde says that Lord Henry is what the world thinks of him)

## Chapter Four

1. Comment on the significance of the line, “The formal monotonous ticking of the Louis Quatorze clock annoyed him” (Pg 55).
2. Refer to pg 57. Discuss Lord Henry’s views of women.
3. What inspired Dorian to visit the theatre in which Sibyl Vane works?
  - 4.1 In what area of London is the theatre?
  - 4.2 Quote a phrase taken from page 58 that describes this area.
5. Refer to pg 61:  
“Ordinary women never appeal to one’s imagination. They are limited to their century. No glamour ever transfigures them. Once knows their minds as easily as one knows their bonnets. Once can always find them. There is no mystery

in any of them. They ride in the Park in the morning, and chatter at tea-parties in the afternoon. They have their stereotyped smile, and their fashionable manner, They are quite obvious. But an actress! How different an actress is! Harry! why didn't you tell me that the only thing worth loving is an actress?"

Dorian speaks of his love for Sibyl, whom he has seen on the stage. In what way is it expected that Dorian would fall in love with an actress?  
(Note that stage performances and portraits are similar in that they both are representations of people)

6. Refer to pg 63: "It was curious me not wanting to know her, wasn't it?"  
Why was Dorian reluctant to meet Sibyl, whom he had fallen in love with?
8. Refer to pg 63. What quote tells us that Sibyl, too, regards Dorian through the lens of art?
9. Identify and comment on the significance of the first play in which Dorian sees Sibyl perform.
10. Refer to pg 64:  
"When is she Sibyl Vane?"  
'Never.'  
'I congratulate you.'

Why would Lord Henry congratulate Dorian on finding such a woman?



*"She is all the great heroines of the world in one. She is more than an individual."*

## Chapter Five

1. Why does Oscar Wilde refer to Mrs Vane's "false-jewelled fingers" (pg 72)?
2. Why would Prince Charming be an appropriate nickname for Sibyl to refer to Dorian by?
3. We learn that the Vanes are in debt, and own fifty pounds to Mr Isaacs. On pg 71, Sibyl states, "He is not a gentleman, mother, and I hate the way he talks to me."  
What does Sibyl mean by "gentleman" in this context?

4. On pg 73, Sibyl thinks of Dorian: “This young man might be rich. If so, marriage should be thought of.”

What does this reveal of Sibyl’s feelings for Dorian?

5. How does James Vane react to the news of Prince Charming/Dorian Gray?

6. Refer to pg 79:

“He is a gentleman,’ said the lad, sullenly.

‘A prince!’ she cried, musically. ‘What more do you want?’

‘He wants to enslave you.’”

What does James mean by “gentleman” in this context?



7. Refer to pg 73: Mrs Vane glanced at her, and, with one of those false theatrical gestures that so often become a mode of second nature to a stage-player, clasped her in her arms. At this moment the door opened, and a young lad with rough brown hair came into the room ... Mrs Vane fixed her eyes on him, and intensified the smile. She mentally elevated her son to the dignity of an audience. She felt sure that the tableau was interesting.”

What does this extract tell us about Mrs Vane’s relationship with the theatre, that we witness throughout this chapter?

8. Is Oscar Wilde commenting on the matter of class difference, or is the Vane family’s lack of money simply mentioned to provide motivation for them to wish to change their social circumstances?

## Chapter Six

1. Refer to pg 86, where Lord Henry says of Sibyl: “Oh, she is better than good - she is beautiful”.

How is this comment typical of Lord Henry?

2. Refer to pg 90: “...When I am with her, I regret all that you have taught me. I become different from what you have known me to be. I am changed, and the mere touch of Sibyl Vane’s hand make me forget you and all your wrong, fascinating, poisonous, delightful theories”.

Comment on the influence that Sibyl is having on Dorian.

3. Refer to pg 90 - 91: “To be good is to be in harmony with one’s self,’ he replied, touching the thin stem of his glass with his pale, fine-pointed fingers.

‘Discord is to be forced to be in harmony with others ... Individualism has really the higher aim. Modern morality consists in accepting the standard of one’s age. I consider that for any man of culture to accept the standard of his age is a form of the grossest immorality.’”

Explain, using your own words, Lord Henry’s understanding of morality.

4. Refer to pg 91, where Basil responds to Lord Henry’s understanding of morality:  
“‘One has to pay on other ways but money.’  
‘What sort of ways, Basil?’  
‘Oh! I should fancy in remorse, in suffering, in ... well, in the consciousness of degradation.’”

What is Basil’s criticism of Lord Henry’s belief system?

5. How do Basil’s and Lord Henry’s differing views on Dorian mirror the dispute between Victorian morality and Aestheticism?



## Chapter Seven

1. Refer to pg 96, where Basil speaks of his understanding of the effect of art: “...To spiritualise one’s age - that is something worth doing. If this girl can give a soul to those who have lived without one, if she can create the sense of beauty in people whose lives have been sordid and ugly, if she can strip them of their selfishness and lend them tears for sorrows that are not their own, she is worthy of all your adoration, worthy of the adoration of the world.”

What, according to Basil, is the chief function of the artist?

2. What becomes apparent about Sibyl’s acting as she takes to the stage?
3. Reread pg 101. What reason does Sibyl give for her poor performance?
4. Why is Sibyl’s loss of art fatal for her relationship with Dorian?
5. Refer to pg 101: “I have grown sick of shadows”. These lines echo Lord Alfred Tennyson’s ballad, “The Lady of Shallot”.
  - 5.1 What is this ballad about?
  - 5.2 How is Sibyl’s reality and fate similar to the Lady of Shallot’s?



*The Lady of Shallot*

6. Dorian is described as he breaks off the engagement, and watches Sibyl's response:  
 "She crouched on the floor like a wounded thing, and Dorian Gray, with his beautiful eyes, looked down at her, and his chiselled lips curled in exquisite disdain" (pg 103).

What is significant about the description of Dorian's beauty in this line?

7. It is in this chapter that the picture begins to change, reflecting in its facial features the cruelty of Dorian's actions as he rejects Sibyl. His moral transformation (transformation is an NB theme!) demonstrates itself in the painting. After noticing the change in the painting and realising that his Faustian Bargain had come to life, what does Dorian decide to do, and why?

### Chapter Eight

1. How does Sibyl die?
2. Comment on Dorian's response to Sibyl's death:  
 "...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" (pg 116).
3. What does Lord Henry mean by the statement, "The girl never really lived, and so she has never really died" (pg 119)?



4. Refer to pg 121:  
 "He felt that the time had really come for making his choice. Or had his choice already been made: Yes, life had decided for him - life, and his own infinite curiosity about life. Eternal youth, infinite passion, pleasures subtle and secret, wild joys and wilder sins - he was to have all these things. The portrait was to bear the burden of his shame: that was all."

What does Dorian decide?

5. Sibyl gives up the artificiality and pretence of art, to live in the real world. This results in her death.  
 Compare and contrast Dorian's fate to Sibyl's.

6. Discuss critically how the picture functions symbolically in the novel. (I would pay special attention to this Q if I were you).
7. What do Dorian's actions, at the end of this chapter (pg 123), reveal about his character?

## Chapter Nine

1. On pg 126, Basil says to Dorian: "Dorian, this is horrible! Something has changed you completely. You look exactly the same wonderful boy who, day after day, used to come down to my studio to sit for his picture. But you were simple, natural, and affectionate then. You were the most unspoiled creature in the world. Now, I don't know what has come over you. You talk as if you had no heart, no pity in you."
  - 1.1 What has shocked Basil?
  - 1.2 What important theme does this passage demonstrate?
2. Why is it unlikely that Dorian will be summoned to the inquest?
  - 3.1 What question does Dorian ask Basil, in order to distract him from the conversation about looking at and displaying the portrait?
  - 3.2 Refer to Basil's response (pg 132):

Dorian, from the moment I met you, your personality had the most extraordinary influence over me. I was dominated, soul, brain, and power, by you. You became to me the visible incarnation of that unseen ideal whose memory haunts us artists like an exquisite dream. I worshipped you. I grew jealous of every one to whom you spoke. I wanted to have you all to myself. I was only happy when I was with you. When you were away from me, you were still present in my art.... Of course, I never let you know anything about this. It would have been impossible. You would not have understood it. I hardly understood it myself. I only knew that I had seen perfection face to face, and that the world had become wonderful to my eyes -- too wonderful, perhaps, for in such mad worships there is peril, the peril of losing them, no less than the peril of keeping them..."

How do you understand Basil's feelings?

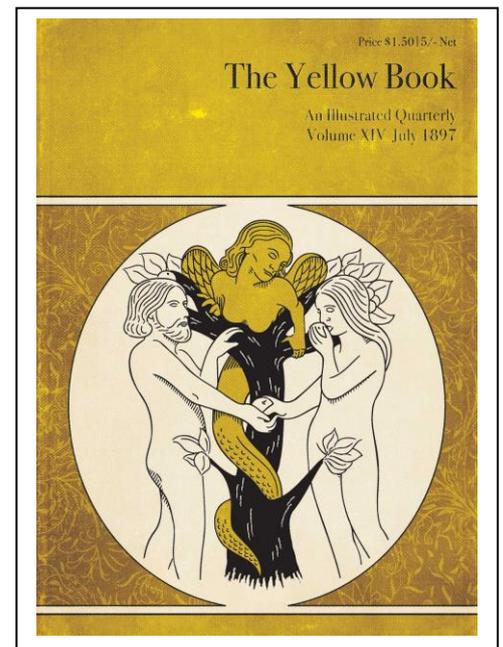


*"To become the spectator of one's own life, as Harry says, is to escape the suffering of life."*

- 3.3 How do you think a Victorian audience would have responded to Basil's confession?
4. Refer to pg 132. Quote the phrase in which Basil sums up his idea of what art should be.
5. Do you agree with Basil when he says that "Art is always more abstract than we fancy ... It often seems to me that art conceals the artist more completely than it ever reveals him"? Give reasons for your answer.
6. What does Basil decide to do with the painting by the end of the chapter?

## Chapter Ten

1. Reread pg 137, in which Dorian thinks about Victor, his servant. How has the portrait affected Dorian's relationship with people?
2. Comment on the significance of the coverlet Dorian uses to conceal the portrait.
3. Discuss the symbolism of the two contrasting texts that Dorian reads that morning: the *St James's Gazette* and the yellow book.
4. Dorian reads the newspaper report of Sibyl's inquest and learns that his name has not been mentioned. He thinks: "How ugly it was! And how horribly real ugliness made things! He felt a little annoyed with Lord Henry for having sent him the report."  
Why does Dorian feel this way?
5. What is the yellow book about?
6. Refer to the description of the yellow book:  
"It was a poisonous book. The heavy odour of incense seemed to cling about its pages and to trouble the brain. The mere cadence of the sentences, the subtle monotony of their music, so full as it was of complex refrains and movements elaborately repeated, produced in the mind of the lad, as he passed from chapter to chapter, a form of reverie, a malady of dreaming, that made him unconscious of the falling day and creeping shadows" (pg 145).



Comment on the symbolism of this description.

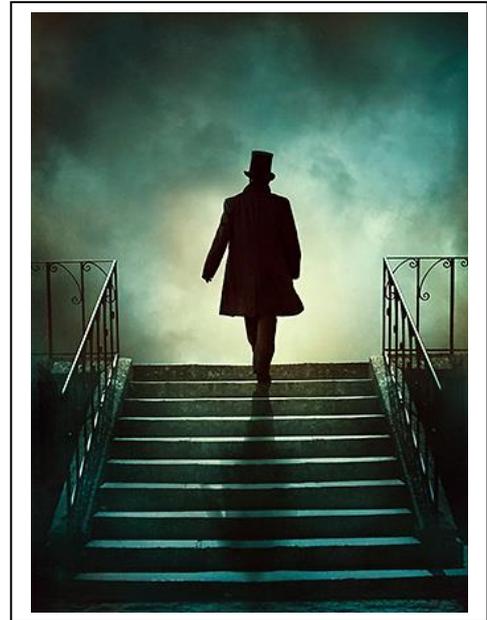
7. Discuss the symbolism of the contrasting connotations of the colour yellow.

## Chapter Eleven

1. Years pass during which Dorian is committed to a life of excess and self-indulgence. Rumours of his lifestyle begin to circulate within London. On pg 148 we are told:  
“Even those who had heard the most evil things against him, and from time to time strange rumours about his mode of life crept through London and became the chatter of the clubs, could not believe anything to his dishonour when they saw him. He had always the look of one who had kept himself unspotted from the world.”  
What does this imply about London society?
2. Refer to pg 148 - 149. What is Dorian’s response to his decaying reflection in the portrait over this period?
3. Dorian “sought to elaborate some new scheme of life that would have its reasoned philosophy and its ordered principles, and find in the spiritualising of the senses its highest realisation” (pg 150).  
Do you think Dorian’s actions and their consequences result in higher realisation, or have spiritual purpose? Explain your answer.
4. The aim of Dorian’s “new Hedonism ... was to be experience itself, and not the fruits of experience, sweet or bitter as they might be” (pg 151).  
Explain what it meant here, in your own words.
5. Refer to pg 162 - 163: “Society, civilized society, at least, is never very ready to believe anything to the detriment of those who are both rich and fascinating. It feels instinctively that manners are of more importance than morals, and, in its opinion, the highest respectability is of much less value than the possession of a good chef.  
Wilde lapses into first-person narration here in order to make a comment on society. What is he saying?
6. Refer to pg 167: “Dorian Gray had been poisoned by a book. There were moments when he looked on evil simply as a mode through which he could realise his conception of the beautiful”.  
How has Dorian’s understanding of beauty changed over the course of the novel?
7. Chapter 11 is very long, and Wilde fills it with an enormous amount of detail and description. Why?

## Chapter Twelve

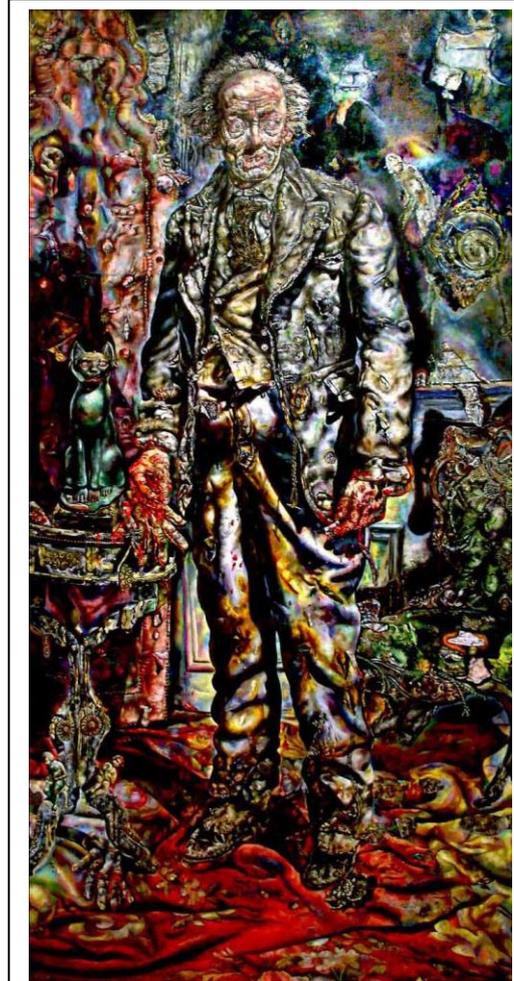
1. Refer to pg 170: “What has become of the Frenchman, by the by?”  
What happened to Dorian’s French servant?
2. Refer to pg 171, where Basil speaks to Dorian about the rumours he has heard: “...Mind you, I don’t believe these rumours at all. At least, I can’t believe them when I see you. Sin is a thing that writes itself across a man’s face. It cannot be concealed...”  
How is this an example of dramatic irony?
3. List the scandals in which Dorian has been implicated.
4. How does the chapter end?



## Chapter Thirteen

1. How does the opening paragraph establish the mood of the chapter?
2. Basil is horrified by the sight of the portrait: “In the left-hand corner was his own name, traced in long letters of bright vermilion” (pg 179).  
Comment on the significance of the colour of Basil’s signature.
3. Dorian is described watching Basil’s horror: “The young man was leaning against the mantelshelf, watching him with that strange expression that one sees on the faces of those who are absorbed in a play when some great artist is acting. There was neither real sorrow in it nor real joy. There was simply the passion of the spectator, with perhaps a flicker of triumph in his eyes” (pg 180).  
How is this response typical of Dorian?
4. Dorian speaks of Basil’s influence: “Years ago, when I was a boy,’ said Dorian Gray, crushing the flower in his hand, ‘you met me, flattered me, and taught me to be vain of my good looks...” (pg 180).
  - 4.1 Of whom are we reminded when Dorian crushes the flower he holds?
  - 4.2 Explain the symbolism of this action.

5. Dorian states that “Each of us has Heaven and Hell in him” (pg 181). Do you agree with Dorian? Explain your answer with reference to Dorian’s character development from the novel as a whole.
6. Basil examines the portrait: “The surface seemed to be quite undisturbed, and as he had left it. It was from within, apparently, that the foulness and horror had come” (pg 181).  
Critically comment on Basil’s distinction between the portrait’s “surface” and the disruption “within” the portrait.
7. Dorian murders Basil. Examine the manner in which Basil’s corpse is described: “the thing was still seated in the chair”; “He could not help seeing the dead thing” (pg 183).  
Account for the diction used in these lines.
8. Dorian “felt that he secret of the whole thing was not to realise the situation” (pg 183). Why does he feel this way?
9. Why is it unlikely that Dorian will be caught for the murder?



*Though your sins be as scarlet, yet I will make them as white as snow.*

## Chapter Fourteen

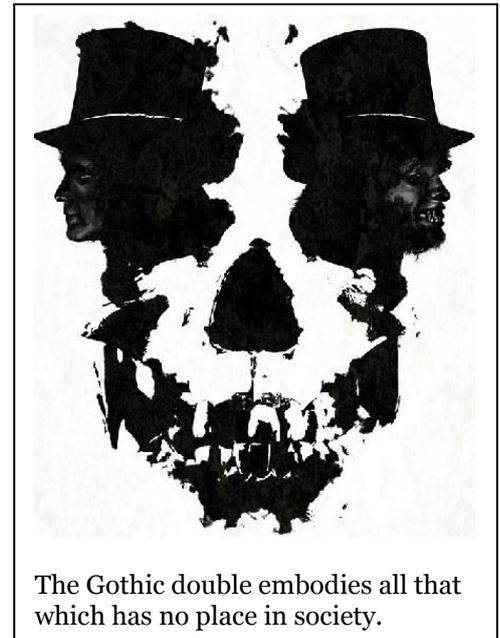
1. What is the relationship between Dorian and Alan Campbell?
2. How does Dorian get Campbell to agree to destroy all evidence of Basil’s corpse?
3. What is the significance of Dorian’s request to Francis to order “twice as many orchids” and for none of them to be “white” (pg 198)?
4. Why does Dorian not want to enter the room in which Basil’s body lies?
5. Refer to pg 199: “Dorian half opened the door. As he did no, he saw the face of the portrait leering in the sunlight”. Comment on the significance of this description.



6. Refer to the description of the glimpse Dorian gets of the portrait: “What was that loathsome red dew that gleamed, wet and glistening, on one of the hands, as though the canvas had sweated blood? How horrible it was! - more horrible, it seemed to him for the moment, than the silent thing that he knew was stretched across the table, the thing whose grotesque misshapen shadow on the spotted carpet showed him that it had not stirred, but was still there, as he had left it” (pg 199).  
Identify and analyse the Gothic elements in these lines.

### Chapter Fifteen

1. Refer to the description of Dorian on pg 202: “His forehead was throbbing with maddened nerves, and he felt wildly excited, but his manner as he bent over his hostess’s hand was as easy and graceful as ever. Perhaps one never seems so much at one’s ease as when once has to play a part ... He himself could not help wondering at the calm of his demeanour, and for a moment he felt keenly the terrible pleasure of a double life”.  
Which aspect of Dorian’s double life are we met with at the start of this chapter?
2. Describe Lady Narborough.
3. Dorian removes a substance from his Chinese box: “a green paste, waxy in lustre, the odour curiously heavy and persistent” (pg 211). What is it?
4. At the end of this chapter, Dorian makes off to the East End of London. Discuss the symbolism of the West End and East End as they appear in the novel as a whole.



### Chapter Sixteen

1. Why does Dorian repeat Lord Henry’s words: “To cure the soul by means of the senses, and the senses by means of the soul” (pg 213)?
2. Refer to pg 215: “Ugliness that had once been hateful to him because it made things real, became dear to him now for that very reason. Ugliness was the one reality. The coarse brawl, the loathsome den, the crude violence of disordered life, the very vileness of thief and outcast, were more vivid, in their intense actuality of impression, than all the gracious shapes of Art, the dreamy shadows of Song. They were what he needed for forgetfulness. In three days he would be free”.

The reference to Art and Song within the East End reminds us of Sibyl. How has Dorian's opinion of Art and Reality changed since his interactions with Sibyl earlier in the novel?

3. Dorian meets Adrian Singleton in the Opium Den. Where did we encounter him before?
4. Dorian is described on pg 217: "He was prisoned in thought. Memory, like a horrible malady, was eating his soul away. From time to time he seemed to see the eyes of Basil Hallward looking at him. Yet he felt he could not stay. The presence of Adrian Singleton troubled him. He wanted to be where no one would know who he was. He wanted to escape from himself."

4.1 Comment on the reference to Basil in this passage.

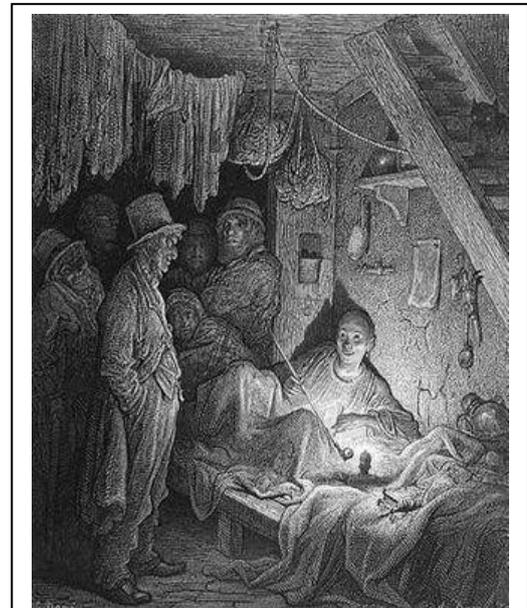
4.2 Why does Adrian Singleton trouble Dorian?

4.3 Has Dorian managed to maintain his position as a 'spectator of life'? Account for your answer.

5. A woman at the opium den refers to Dorian as both "the devil's bargain" and as "Prince Charming" (pg 218).

5.1 What is the significance of the contrast between these two names?

5.2 Who do you think this woman is? Give reasons for your answer with close reference to clues given within the chapter.



*In three days he would be free.*

6. How does Dorian escape being killed by James Vane?

## Chapter Seventeen

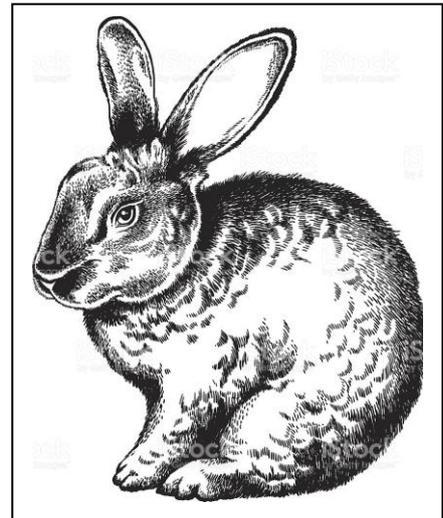
1. Where is this chapter set?
2. Critically comment on the Duchess of Monmouth (Gladys). Refer both to the descriptions of her in this chapter as well as in chapter 15 (pg 209).
3. What scares Dorian at the end of this chapter?

4. Comment on Wilde's depiction of the upper classes within this chapter.

### Chapter Eighteen

1. Refer to the description of Dorian on pg 232: "The next day he did not leave the house, and indeed, spent most of the time in his own room, sick with a wild terror of dying, and yet indifferent to life itself. The consciousness of being hunted, snared, tracked down, had begun to dominate him."  
What is revealed of the consequences of Dorian's lifestyle in these lines?

2. On pg 234, Dorian tries to save a rabbit from being shot: "Sir Geoffrey put his gun to his shoulder, but there was something in the animal's grace of movement that strangely charmed Dorian Gray, and he cried out at once, 'Don't shoot it, Geoffrey. Let it live.'"  
What motivates Dorian to do this? Explain your answer in full.



3. Comment on Lord Henry's advice to Dorian: "I had better tell them that the shooting is stopped for to-day. It would not look well to go on" (pg 235).
4. What does the gardener give to Dorian?
5. The Duchess of Monmouth is described by Dorian as "looking like Artemis" (pg 237). Why is this an appropriate comparison?
6. Refer to pg 235. Comment on Dorian's response to 'the beater's' death.
7. Dorian discovers that the beater was in fact James Vane. Comment on the symbolism of James' death.

### Chapter Nineteen

1. Lord Henry states that "civilisation" is attained in two ways: "One is by being cultured, the other by being corrupt" (pg 243).
  - 1.1 How would Lord Henry define culture?
  - 1.2 What has this novel taught us about Lord Henry's idea of culture and its relationship with corruption?

2. Who is Hetty and what is her relationship with Dorian?
3. On pg 244, Dorian talks to Lord Henry about Hetty: “She was quite beautiful, and wonderfully like Sibyl Vane, I think it was that which first attracted me to her”. What does this reveal to us about Dorian’s intentions?
4. Lord Henry hears of Dorian’s resolve to be good and of his decision to end his romance with Hetty. He responds: “I should think the novelty of the emotion must have given you a thrill of real pleasure, Dorian” (pg 244). What is Lord Henry implying here?
5. We discover that Alan Campbell has committed suicide (pg 245). What is the significance of this?
6. What do we learn of Lord Henry’s marriage in this chapter?
7. Lord Henry states: “Poor Victoria! I was very fond of her. The house is rather lonely without her. Of course, married life is merely a habit, a bad habit. But then one regrets the loss even of one’s worst habits” (pg 246). He also says, “I have sorrows, Dorian, of my own, that even you know nothing of” (pg 250). Do you have any sympathy for Lord Henry? Explain your answer.
8. What is your opinion of Lord Henry’s statement that crime is to the poor what art is to the wealthy, “simply a method of procuring extraordinary sensations” (pg 247)?
9. Refer to pg 251 - 252. What views of Aestheticism does Lord Henry express on these pages?
10. Do you think it is possible, at this stage of his life, for Dorian to live in a moral and unselfish manner? Explain your answer.



*“Don’t stop. I want music tonight. It seems to me that you are the young Apollo...”*

## **Chapter Twenty**

1. Dorian thinks that “There was purification in punishment” (pg 255). How does this thought differ from Lord Henry’s ideas about purification? (Note: He spoke of this to Dorian when they first met).
2. Comment critically on Dorian’s response to Basil’s and Alan’s deaths: “The excitement, such as it was, over Basil Hallward’s disappearance would pass away. It was already waning. He was perfectly safe there. Nor, indeed, was it

the death of Basil Hallward that weighed most upon his mind. It was the living death of his own soul that troubled him ... As for Alan Campbell, his suicide had been his own act. He had chosen to do it. It was nothing to him” (pg 256).

3. In this chapter, Dorian breaks a mirror given to him by Lord Henry (pg 255) and he also stabs Basil's portrait of him. Discuss the symbolism of these two acts with reference to the motifs of mirrors and masks.



NOTE:

I wrote most of these questions myself and got others from the additional material in the DBE prescribed version of Wilde's "The Picture of Dorian Gray", as well as from [www.schmoop.com](http://www.schmoop.com) and the MacRat Publishing Teachers' Resources Series.

Jane Horsfield