

THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

NOTES

including

- *Life and Background of the Author*
- *Introduction to the Novel*
- *List of Characters*
- *Critical Commentaries*
- *Critical Essays*
- *Review Questions and Essay Topics*
- *Selected Bibliography*

by

Stanley P. Baldwin, M.A.
University of Kentucky



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THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

Notes

LIFE AND BACKGROUND OF THE AUTHOR

Childhood to Adulthood. Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde was born on October 16, 1854, in Dublin, Ireland. He later dropped the three middle names, stating that his entire name was much too long for someone who would be as famous as he. As late as his college days, however, he signed his contributions to the Trinity College classical magazine *Kottabos* with the initials "O. F. O. F. W. W." Wilde would spend his life daring to be different.

Born to William Robert Wills Wilde, a noted ear and eye surgeon and author, and Jane Francesca Elgee Wilde, a novelist and poet who wrote using the pseudonym *Speranza*, Wilde had an older brother, William Robert Kingsbury Wills Wilde ("Willie"), and a younger sister, Isola Francesca Emily Wilde, who died of a fever and "sudden effusion on the brain" just short of her tenth birthday in 1867. Wilde was especially affected by her death and later wrote a poem ("Requiescat") about her. Isola's attending physician remembered Wilde as "an affectionate, gentle, retiring, dreamy boy."

In 1871, when he was sixteen years old, Wilde enrolled in Trinity College in Dublin. He was already fluent in French and especially interested in Greek classical literature. He was considerably influenced by his tutor, the Reverend J. P. Mahaffy, a professor of ancient history whom Wilde would later call "my first and my best teacher." Wilde toured Italy with Reverend Mahaffy in 1875 and visited Greece and Italy with his former tutor in 1877. He credited Mahaffy with teaching him to "love Greek things" and opening his mind. Mahaffy's influence may have encouraged Wilde's imagination. On one occasion, Mahaffy commented that *he* was only punished once in his life, and that was "for telling the truth." An acquaintance responded, "It certainly cured you, Mahaffy."

At twenty, Wilde matriculated at Magdalen College, Oxford. He loved the school and the life, calling Oxford the most beautiful place in England and recalling this as the "most flower-like time" in his life. There were social adjustments, but he soon learned to control a convulsive laugh and a lisp and to lose his Irish accent.

Writing and Reputation. Brilliant and talented, if not always dedicated, Wilde published his first work in verse, "Chorus of Cloud-Maidens," in the *Dublin University Magazine* in November 1875. A loose translation of songs from Aristophanes' *The Clouds*, the work indicates Wilde's interest in the classics. In 1878, he won the Newdigate Prize for Poetry from Oxford for "Ravenna," a poem in which he recalls his visit to the Italian city of Ravenna the previous year and speculates on its fall from greatness, a popular theme with Wilde and one that he would tragically follow in his own life.

Wilde became devoted to Aestheticism during these Oxford years (see "Oscar Wilde's Aesthetics" in *Critical Essays* at the end of this book for more information on the Aesthetic movement). He was able to laugh at the movement's superficial excesses as well as his own. Although he was temporarily expelled from Oxford in 1877 for a long absence without permission, he earned a rare "double first" in *Literae Humaniores*. In November of 1878, he was awarded the Bachelor of Arts degree.

By the end of 1881, Wilde's reputation as a poet and art critic, and especially as an advocate of Aestheticism, allowed him to set off for a year-long lecture tour of America. The tour was a highlight of his career; before reaching his twenty-eighth birthday, he had become an international celebrity. In his personal life, Wilde married Constance Mary Lloyd on May 29, 1884, when he was twenty-nine years old.

Although Wilde liked to pose as a dandy who seldom worked, he was a very productive journalist, critic, editor, dramatist, poet, and fiction writer. Writing nine plays between 1879 and 1894, his reputation as a dramatist really was earned by *Salome* and by four comedies: *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *A Woman of No Importance*, *An Ideal Husband*, and *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Wilde gloried in the decadence of *Salome*, a one-act play about the biblical character who danced for King Herod in order to obtain the decapitated head of John the Baptist. The exotic and violent production was

welcomed in France before it could be performed in Victorian England. The censorship that *Salome* received in England anticipated Wilde's personal problems in the courts. *The Importance of Being Earnest*, a combination of wit and farce, is Wilde's most enduring play and arguably his best.

A reader new to Wilde might be surprised to learn that most of the author's fiction consists of two volumes of fairy tales. Originally told to adults at social occasions, the stories are not necessarily meant for children. Asked about the intended audience for his fairy tales, Wilde responded, "I had about as much intention of pleasing the British child as I did of pleasing the British public." Although he sounds indifferent, Wilde probably hoped to please both audiences. Certainly he welcomed an enthusiastic response from his mentor (from Oxford days) Walter Pater, an important proponent of Aestheticism, who especially appreciated "The Happy Prince" and "The Selfish Giant."

Wilde's only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, first appeared as a novella in the June 20, 1890, issue of *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*. *Dorian Gray* caused quite a stir; critics and readers alike called it an immoral story. Wilde published an expanded and revised version of the story in book form the next year. He included a preface that contained, among other aphorisms (brief statements espousing truths or opinions), a biting response to his critics: There is no such thing as a moral or immoral book; a book is just written well or written poorly.

The most traumatic events in Wilde's life were the court trials, and later imprisonment, concerning his personal behavior (see "Three Trials: Oscar Wilde Goes to Court, 1895" in *Critical Essays*). Prison was very hard on Wilde. He wrote about it, his relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas, and other matters in a long essay, taking the form of a letter to Douglas, later published as *De Profundis*. The essay was written from January to March of 1897 and took the form of a letter partly because prison rules allowed Wilde to write *only* letters. Rather than sending the letter to Douglas, Wilde gave the manuscript to his loyal friend Robert Ross after Wilde was released in May of that year. His last creative work, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, was written after his release and was published in February 1898. A tale of murder and imprisonment, it contains one

of Wilde's more famous lines: "Yet each man kills the thing he loves."

Constance, Wilde's wife, died April 7, 1898. They had two sons, Cyril (born June 5, 1885) and Vyvyan (born November 5, 1886). Wilde's wife changed her name and that of her sons to "Holland" in September 1895 because of her husband's trials and imprisonment. She ultimately decided against divorce but moved the boys out of England. Wilde spent the last three and a half years of his life in Europe, living under the assumed name of Sebastian Melmoth. An ancestor on his mother's side, Charles Maturin, had written a successful novel called *Melmoth the Wanderer*, and Wilde did seem restless and lost in his final years. The trials and prison time had ruined him. He died bankrupt in a Paris hotel on November 30, 1900, at the age of forty-six, receiving the rites of the Roman Catholic Church. A Latin phrase, from the Book of Job, is inscribed on his tombstone: *Verbis meis addere nihil audebant et super illos stillebat eloquium meum*—"To my words they dare add nothing, and my speech fell upon them."

INTRODUCTION TO THE NOVEL

On August 30, 1889, Philadelphia publisher Joseph M. Stoddart, managing editor of *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, invited a few guests to dinner at the Langham Hotel in London. Among them were two promising young writers: Arthur Conan Doyle and Oscar Wilde. Doyle recounts the events of what he calls "a golden evening" in his autobiographical *Memories and Adventures* (1924). Stoddart was considering an English publication of *Lippincott's* with a British editor and British contributors. As a result of that evening, Doyle contributed to *Lippincott's* his second Sherlock Holmes story, "The Sign of Four." Wilde published his first version of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in the magazine's July 1890 issue.

Initial response to Wilde's novel was negative if not abusive. The *St. James Gazette* of June 20, 1890, refers to the "garbage of the French *Décadents*" and the "prosy rigmaroles" of the story. The *Daily Chronicle* of June 30 calls it a "poisonous book." The *Scots Observer* of July 5 asks, "Why go grubbing in muck-heaps?"

Wilde responded to the criticism of his work with numerous letters to editors and added a preface to the book version that came out in the spring of 1891. He also extensively revised *Lippincott's* version, adding six new chapters (3, 5, 15, 16, 17, and 18), softening the homoerotic references, and dividing Chapter 13 of the original text into Chapters 19 and 20 of the book. Contrary to the reviews' charge that the novel was immoral, Wilde was concerned that the novel was *too* moral, that it was didactic in its portrayal of the wages of sin.

The revised version evoked less negative response, possibly because most of the uproar about the work had faded. W. B. Yeats, the Irish poet and dramatist who would receive the Nobel Prize for literature in 1923, had some reservations but called it a "wonderful book" in the *United Ireland* of September 26, 1891. Arthur Conan Doyle was supportive of *Dorian Gray* in a letter to Wilde. In his response, in April 1891, Wilde wrote, "I cannot understand how they can treat *Dorian Gray* as immoral. My difficulty was to keep the inherent moral subordinate to the artistic and dramatic effect, and it seems to me that the moral is too obvious." Over the years, writers as diverse as James Joyce and Joyce Carol Oates have praised Wilde with some reservations. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is now considered to be at least a pivotal work, if not a classic.

Sources from which Wilde drew for his novel include the Faust legend and the Narcissus myth from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Critics cite various sources for the changing portrait motif. One is that the writer sat for a painter named Basil Ward, who, after finishing the portrait, remarked that it would be delightful if Wilde could remain as he was while the picture aged; however, there is no historical indication that Wilde ever sat for a Basil Ward. Another version of this story links the concept of a portrait aging to a Canadian artist named Frances Richards.

Several critics have noted that the politician and novelist Benjamin Disraeli (1804-81) anonymously published a book called *Vivian Grey* in the 1820s and that this novel anticipates Wilde's work. Several other nineteenth-century novels make use of a magic picture, or *doppelgänger* (a ghostly double of a living person). Wilde's work is so creative, however, that these influences appear to be only coincidental.

The structure of *Dorian Gray* is balanced between Lord Henry's early influence on Dorian (the first ten chapters) and Dorian's life as an adult (the last ten chapters). Each section begins with an expository chapter. Wilde uses devices such as dinner parties to provide temporary relief from intense action. Note also that Wilde's talents as a dramatist often are applied to the novel.

Major symbols in the novel include the portrait, which dominates the story as it reflects Dorian's increasing fall into debauchery. The "yellow book" reflects Lord Henry's continuing influence and seems to be a demonic force of its own. The theater run by Mr. Isaacs is a fantasy world for Dorian, who seems incapable of dealing with Sibyl as a real person. The white narcissus reflects Dorian's adoration of self. Lord Henry plays Dorian like a violin, which is mentioned early in the book and becomes a symbol of manipulation. The opera, where the singer Patti performs, is the essence of Aestheticism, while Daly's opium den represents the depths of depravity and excess.

Major themes include the Faust legend, the balance of body and soul, the dual nature of man, self-discovery, narcissism, friendship, the fall of man, sin and redemption, and the dangers of personal influence or manipulation. Beyond all of these critical approaches, the story can simply be enjoyed on its own as a well-written tale of suspense and surprise.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Dorian Gray

Called "Prince Charming" by Sibyl Vane, he is the main character of the novel. The book revolves around a secret pact that Dorian makes and the subsequent destruction of his soul.

Basil Hallward

The artist who paints Dorian's portrait is a somewhat secretive but decent man who tries to be a good friend. Dorian kills Basil in a moment of self-centered hysteria.

Lord Henry Wotton

Dubbed "Prince Paradox" by Dorian, he serves as mentor to Dorian and encourages him to lead a life devoted to pleasure. His performance in conversation evokes comparison to Wilde himself; he speaks most of the brilliant aphorisms that appear in the novel.

Sibyl Vane

The seventeen-year-old actress adores "Prince Charming" and eventually commits suicide because of him.

James Vane

Sibyl's large and brash brother is very protective of her. He vows to kill anyone who harms Sibyl.

Mrs. Vane

A woman with a secret past, she considers the practical side of her daughter Sibyl's relationship with "Prince Charming."

Lady Victoria Wotton

A delight in disarray, Lord Henry's wife divorces him.

Lady Agatha

Lord Henry's aunt hosts a luncheon attended by Lord Henry and Dorian Gray in Chapter 3.

Lady Brandon

She introduces Basil Hallward to Dorian Gray at a party.

Alan Campbell

He is the scientist and former friend of Dorian Gray who disposes of Basil Hallward's body at Dorian's request.

Sir Geoffrey Clouston

A brother of the Duchess of Monmouth, he plays a key role in the shooting incident at Selby, Dorian's country estate.

Margaret Devereux

Dorian's deceased mother is remembered in an account by Lord Fermor.

Lord Fermor ("Uncle George")

Lord Henry's uncle provides background information on Dorian Gray.

Victor

Dorian's first valet initially arouses suspicion in his employer, but they part on congenial terms.

Francis

Dorian's valet after Victor leaves.

Dorian Gray's Gardener

He delivers a letter to Dorian at the country estate.

Lady Gwendolyn

Lord Henry's sister provides a box at the opera and later is involved with Dorian.

Hansom Driver

He drives Dorian to the opium den.

Mr. Hubbard

The frame maker from South Audley Street, with his assistant, moves Dorian's portrait to the attic schoolroom.

Mr. Isaacs

Sibyl Vane's Jewish manager and producer is described in stereotypical terms by Dorian.

Lord Kelso

Dorian's hard-hearted grandfather apparently had his own daughter's husband killed.

Mrs. Leaf

Dorian's housekeeper is an efficient, friendly sort. She gives the keys to the attic room to Dorian.

Hetty Merton

A naïve but beautiful village girl, she reminds Dorian of Sibyl Vane. Dorian is quite proud of himself for sparing her.

Duchess of Monmouth ("Gladys")

Attractive and younger than her husband, she flirts with Dorian.

Duke of Monmouth

The husband of Gladys is sixty and weary.

Lady Narborough

A flirtatious, elderly friend of Dorian, she hosts a dinner party attended by Dorian and Lord Henry in Chapter 15.

Parker

Basil Hallward's butler.

Policeman

Summoned by passersby, he rings the door at Dorian's house several times but receives no answer when a cry and a crash are heard from the attic room.

Two Passersby

Two men, one of them the uncle of a lad "ruined" by Dorian, hear the cry and crash from the attic and fetch a policeman.

Adrian Singleton

Another young man badly influenced by Dorian, he is at the opium den when Dorian arrives.

Thornton

Dorian's gamekeeper has some surprising news about the corpse at Selby.

Woman at Bar

The outspoken woman at the bar of the opium den apparently is one of Dorian's early victims.

CRITICAL COMMENTARIES

PREFACE

Oscar Wilde's preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* consists of a list of Wilde's aphorisms that deal directly with art, artists, critics, and audience but only obliquely with the novel. They speak to the importance of beauty espoused by the Aesthetic movement.

The preface offers one of Wilde's most famous aphorisms: "There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all." According to Wilde, the artist might consider the moral or immoral lives of people as part of the subject matter of a work, but art itself is not meant to instruct the reader. The true artist is not out to prove anything and makes no judgments of right or wrong. What people call "vices" or "virtues" are merely materials for the artist. Those who attempt to go beneath the surface of a work, or to read meaning into a symbol, do so at their own risk. Considerable disagreement about a work of art only proves that the work is "new, complex, and vital."

Wilde concludes the preface by saying that it is fine to create something useful so long as it is not admired as art. The only reason for creating something useless *is* to admire it a great deal. Thus, "All art is quite useless." That is, it exists for its own sake as art ("art for art's sake") and not for some moral purpose.

The preface sets the tone for the book and lets the reader know that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* will be a book of expansive ideas and wonderful language.

CHAPTER 1

Summary

The Picture of Dorian Gray opens in the London studio of Basil Hallward, an artist. With him, reclining and smoking a cigarette, is Lord Henry "Harry" Wotton. Basil is finishing painting a portrait of "a young man of extraordinary personal beauty." Lord Henry praises the portrait as the best work that Basil has done and insists that it must be shown at a suitable gallery. To Lord Henry's surprise, Basil states that he will not show it anywhere: "I have put too much of myself in it."

Basil tries to keep the painting's subject's identity a secret from Lord Henry, then accidentally discloses that the beautiful young man's name is Dorian Gray. Basil admits that he prefers to keep favorite people to himself, not even telling others their names because he feels he might lose a part of them. In fact, he has "grown to love secrecy." Even when he takes a trip, he keeps the destination private, a revelation that becomes important later in the story. Lord Henry answers that he understands, but he is more interested in Basil's reason for not exhibiting the portrait.

Basil responds that any painting done with true feeling reveals more of the artist than it does the subject. He fears that the painting will reveal the secret of his soul.

Basil explains how he met Dorian at Lady Brandon's home. He felt terror upon first seeing Dorian because he sensed that the young man's personality was so powerful that it could absorb him. More important, Dorian inspires a fresh approach to art in Basil, allowing him to produce the best work of his professional life. Because Basil worries that the public will detect his personal and

artistic idolatry of Gray, he will not exhibit the portrait. Echoing a basic tenet of Aestheticism, he suggests that an artist should create beautiful work for its own sake; art shouldn't *mean* anything. He dismisses artists and critics who see art as a means for biographical expression, and he refuses to have his work thought of in that way.

When Lord Henry expresses his desire to meet Gray, Basil explains that he wants to keep Dorian and the painting hidden away so that neither Dorian nor the world will ever know about his "curious artistic idolatry." Lord Henry suggests that Basil's feeling may pass and that he will eventually become indifferent to Dorian, but Basil disagrees.

At that moment, the butler enters, announcing the arrival of Dorian, and Lord Henry laughs that they *must* meet now. Before entering the studio where Dorian is waiting, Basil asks Lord Henry not to influence or take away the person who inspires him as an artist.

Commentary

Chapter 1 introduces two of the major characters of the book, and the reader learns a good deal about them. Basil is an artist of apparently independent means. He is secretive, and Wilde even mentions that Basil has disappeared without notice in the past. In addition, the distinctive toss of his head, the one that "used to make his friends laugh at him at Oxford," characterizes Basil as someone who is thought of as an odd, yet endearing, fellow.

Although Basil claims to be independent, he is instantly overpowered by Dorian upon meeting him, becoming dependent on Dorian immediately as his muse, spirit, art, and life. Basil's attraction to Dorian seems to be both professional and personal. Dorian inspires Basil to a new vision of art, combining Greek perfection with Romantic passion. However, there is every implication of something more personal in the attraction. Basil is also a jealous person, wanting to keep Dorian from Lord Henry so that he can have Dorian all to himself.

The other main character introduced in Chapter 1 is Lord Henry Wotton, a very intelligent, confident, manipulative man. He decadently smokes opium-tainted cigarettes and has a commanding presence no matter where he is or whom he socializes with. He

is very judgmental and enjoys sounding profound. Like Wilde himself, Lord Henry often speaks in aphorisms. As he speaks with Basil, Lord Henry picks a daisy from the grass to examine it, later pulling the daisy apart, an act that symbolizes his role throughout the novel as a manipulator and destroyer of beauty for his own amusement.

Although it may seem strange to categorize a painting as a character, Basil's portrait of Dorian plays such an important role in the book that the reader is actually introduced to the painting as if it were a character before meeting Dorian himself. Perhaps Wilde is indicating that Dorian's reputation for physical beauty precedes him and is more important to his character than any other attribute. In any case, the presence of the portrait in Chapter 1 allows the reader to hear something about Dorian before his character appears in the novel. Basil speaks at length about Dorian, stating that he is charming, but also that "Now and then, however, he is horribly thoughtless, and seems to take a real delight in giving me pain." This characterization links Dorian with Lord Henry as a manipulator and foreshadows their close relationship later in the story.

Chapter 1 also introduces some of the major themes of the novel: the importance and power of beauty in relation to the intellect and the soul, and the fleeting nature of beauty. While discussing the merits of beauty as opposed to intellect, Basil states that there is "a fatality about all physical and intellectual distinction, the sort of fatality that seems to dog through history the faltering steps of kings." Basil's statement indicates that physical and intellectual excellence are often the downfall of those who possess them. The reader should note how Basil's statement rings true throughout the novel.

Wilde claimed that Lord Henry represented his public image but that the author actually was more like Basil and yearned to be more like Dorian. While the reader must always take care in accepting Wilde's comments at face value, he was like Basil in that he was a creative artist and privately perhaps less secure than his public image. He certainly did admire youth and beauty, which Dorian possesses. Still, Lord Henry is the Wildean character in this novel: bright, witty, and controlling.

(Here and in the following sections, difficult words and phrases are explained.)

- **Persian saddle-bags** enormous leather bags laid across the backs of camels, behind the saddle; here, a number of them are stuffed and arranged together so that a person can lounge or recline on them.
- **blossoms of a laburnum** a small, spreading tree with golden flowers and highly poisonous seeds.
- **the long tussore-silk curtains** brown silk from India, usually stronger but more coarsely woven than Chinese silk.
- **straggling woodbine** In the United States, woodbine is called wild honeysuckle and is sometimes referred to as Virginia creeper.
- **the bourdon note of a distant organ** a bourdon note is an extremely low, droning note.
- **the Grosvenor** For thirteen years, from 1877 to 1890, the Grosvenor Gallery was one of London's most prestigious galleries. During its heyday it often featured works from the Aesthetic movement, mentioned in Wilde's novel.
- **stars and garters** a reference to various public decorations such as the Order of the Garter, England's highest order of knighthood.
- **précis** French, meaning "brief summary."
- **salon** French, meaning "living room" or "parlor"; here, it means a weekly or monthly gathering of artists and intellectuals.
- **tremulous** vibrating or quivering.
- **ensconced** settled securely or comfortably.
- **pallid** abnormally pale.
- **truculent** savage, belligerent.
- **skeins** lengths of thread or yarn wound into long, loose coils.
- **languid** lacking energy or spirit.
- **proletariat** the poorest class of working people.
- **dowagers** rich widows.

- **the Academy** The Royal Academy of Arts in London, founded in 1768. Its annual exhibition, which has been held every summer without a break since 1769, features the best 1,500 paintings, sculptures, drawings, and engravings from those submitted for judging.
- **Oxford** one of the two most revered British universities; the other is Cambridge.
- **He is a Narcissus** a self-centered person who is exceedingly fond of his appearance.
- **I went to a crush** a cocktail party.
- **She brought me up to royalties** Here, the reference is to frequent dinners and parties with the titled upper class.
- **the East End** the industrial or working class area of London, east of the banking and commercial section of London, referred to as "the City."

CHAPTER 2

Summary

The chapter begins as Basil and Lord Henry enter the studio. When Lord Henry meets Dorian, he notices that Dorian is very handsome and that "All the candor of youth was there, as well as youth's passionate purity."

Basil wants to finish the portrait of Dorian and asks Lord Henry to leave, but Dorian insists that he remain. Dorian has "taken a fancy" to Lord Henry.

Dorian is intrigued that Lord Henry might be a "very bad influence." Lord Henry responds prophetically with one of his aphorisms: "There is no such thing as a good influence, Mr. Gray. All influence is immoral"—that is, to influence someone is to alter his view of himself. In a key statement that echoes Wilde's personal philosophy, Lord Henry asserts, "The aim of life is self-development. To realize one's nature perfectly—that is what each of us is here for." He laments that humanity has lost courage, and he presents a monologue on courage, fear, living life fully, and the virtues of yielding to temptation.

Dorian senses "entirely fresh influences" at work on him and begs Lord Henry to stop his speech. Dorian wants to try not to think. After a few minutes of silence, Dorian and Lord Henry

retire to the garden; Basil says he must finish up the portrait's background but will join them shortly.

In the garden, Lord Henry continues to influence Dorian. He tells the young man that only the senses can cure the soul just as the soul is the only remedy for the senses. Speaking at length on the virtues of youth and beauty, claiming that "Beauty is a form of Genius," he urges Dorian to be selfish with his youth while he has it and to seek a "new Hedonism," elevating the pursuit of pleasure to a dominating level. Youth and beauty are the finest of all treasures, and they should be cherished and guarded because they so quickly fade. In fact, he asserts, "There is absolutely nothing in the world but youth."

Dorian is frightened but stirred by Lord Henry's speech. Basil interrupts and asks the two to rejoin him in the studio so that he can finish the portrait.

When Dorian looks at the painting, he is quite moved, as if he sees himself for the first time. Recalling the words of Lord Henry, he first recognizes the extraordinary beauty and youth in the portrait and then is pained by the thought of losing it. He envies the figure in the painting, saying that he would give his soul to be young forever as the painting will be. Influenced by Lord Henry's words on youth and beauty, he is terrified of aging. He fears that he will lose everything when he loses his good looks. Impulsively vowing that he will kill himself when he grows old, he repeats his wish that the portrait might age while he remains young.

Basil accuses Lord Henry of causing all this turmoil, but Lord Henry says that he has merely brought forth the true Dorian. Basil decides to destroy the portrait rather than have it upset the lives of the three men, but Dorian stops him. "It would be murder," Dorian says.

After a sense of calm is restored, Lord Henry invites Dorian to join him at the theater that evening and offers the young man a ride home in his carriage. Basil protests but concludes that he will stay with "the real Dorian," the portrait. He reminds Lord Henry that he trusts him not to influence Dorian further. Lord Henry laughingly responds, "I wish I could trust myself."

Commentary

Chapter 2 is one of the most important chapters in the novel. First, it introduces the title character, Dorian. The reader is assured of his physical beauty, with his "finely curved scarlet lips, his frank blue eyes, his crisp gold hair." Basil and Lord Henry are older, perhaps in their early thirties, but Dorian is past twenty and no child. Still, he has retained remarkable innocence and even "purity." He seems less mature than his years: He pouts; he is petulant; he acts spoiled. He blushes, becomes unreasonably upset, and cries.

Lord Henry, who enjoys manipulating people, spots Dorian's vulnerability immediately and goes to work. He soon has planted the seeds of terror in the young man, an unreasonable and immature fear of growing old and losing his youthful beauty. When Basil complains about Lord Henry's manipulating Dorian, Lord Henry responds that he is merely bringing out the true Dorian, and maybe he is.

Dorian is easily swayed by Lord Henry's seductive ideas, revealing that Dorian's true morals are vague, to say the least. At the beginning of the chapter, Dorian has no greater friend than Basil, but by the end of the chapter, he has abandoned Basil for Lord Henry after a very short afternoon. The reader might first attribute Dorian's weakness and fickle nature to youth, but the change in his nature occurs only after he has realized the importance of his own beauty, a very worldly attitude. In this short chapter, the reader not only meets the main character of the book; the reader also witnesses a complete transition in his nature from innocence to self-involved worldliness. Dorian's fall from grace takes place in just a few short pages.

Chapter 2 is also very important because it introduces the vehicle that propels the rest of the story—Dorian's wish that the painting show those horrible signs of age that he fears, leaving him forever young. Dorian's wish about the painting introduces the Faust theme, which Wilde develops throughout the book. (The Faust legend was well known to Wilde through popular culture.) Faust, legend has it, sold his soul to the devil in exchange for knowledge and power. The Faust legend raises the question of eternal damnation due to the unpardonable sin of despair. Certainly it is a sin for the Faustian character to make a pact with

the devil. However, he can escape, even at the end of his life, if he repents and asks for God's forgiveness. Usually, the character feels he is beyond God's help, which is an insult to God, who is all-powerful, according to Christian philosophy. Despair is the only unpardonable sin because it keeps the sinner from asking for God's help.

As Dorian's character evolves throughout the novel, the reader should keep in mind the Faust legend and how Oscar Wilde applies it to Dorian's character. In light of the Faust legend, the reader might ask at this point what Lord Henry's role is. If he is not the devil literally, he certainly seems to be playing the devil's part. More accurately, he plays the devil's advocate, leading Dorian into an unholy pact by manipulating his innocence and insecurity. Lord Henry's role in Dorian's downfall is implied rather than explicitly defined, and the reader need not conclude that Lord Henry is aware of his demonic role. However, he does enjoy controlling people and playing with their minds. In the context of the Faust theme, perhaps he is the devil's unwitting representative.

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- **Schumann** Robert Schumann (1810–56) was a German composer.
 - ***moue*** French, meaning "pout."
 - **Hedonism** This ethical doctrine, accepted by many in the Aesthetic movement, advocates the intrinsic goodness of pleasure.
 - **penitent** feeling or expressing remorse for one's misdeeds or sins.
 - **candor** frankness, straightforwardness.
 - **petulant** unreasonably irritable.
 - **paradox** an apparently contradictory statement that yet may be true.
 - **panegyric** a formal expression of praise, sometimes for the dead.
 - **Hellenic** pertaining to the ancient Greeks or their language.
 - **caprice** something done impulsively or whimsically.

CHAPTER 3

Summary

As the chapter opens, it is half-past noon the next day. Lord Henry calls on his uncle, Lord Fermor, to learn about Dorian's

heritage. The uncle is a delightful old curmudgeon—wealthy, cynical, and very knowledgeable about everyone else's private business. He and Lord Henry get along well, and the old man is pleased to tell him all about Dorian's past.

Dorian is the grandson of Lord Kelso and the son of Kelso's daughter, Margaret Devereux. Lady Margaret was an extremely beautiful woman who displeased her father by marrying beneath her; she married a penniless, low-level soldier, as Lord Fermor recalls. Kelso reportedly hired "some Belgian brute" to insult the husband and lure him into a duel, in which he was killed. Lady Margaret was with child: Dorian. She died within a year or so of the duel. Kelso is dead and probably left his fortune to Dorian. The mother had money of her own, so Dorian should be well off financially. After some casual conversation about the charming, deceptive nature of American girls, Lord Henry is off to his Aunt Agatha's for lunch.

Dorian also attends the luncheon, and Lord Henry dominates the conversation, delighting his audience at the table with a number of aphorisms—for example, "I can sympathize with everything except suffering." (A devout Aesthetic, Lord Henry wants people to sympathize with beauty, the use of color, and the joy of life.) To an aging duchess, he suggests, "To get back one's youth, one has merely to repeat one's follies." Lord Henry then launches into a triumphant monologue in praise of folly that echoes his speech to Dorian the day before in Basil's garden.

After the luncheon, Lord Henry and Dorian leave together.

Commentary

The chief contribution of this entertaining chapter is that the reader learns about Dorian's background. Fermor's details about Dorian's troubled family establish the young man as a romantic and tragic figure.

The only other important information that the reader gets in this chapter is about the relationship between Dorian and Lord Henry, which appears to be solidifying quickly. Early in the chapter, Lord Henry recalls that talking with Dorian the night before had been like "playing upon an exquisite violin." He likens his influence on Dorian to a sculptor's shaping of a statue out of beautiful

marble. Lord Henry is not subtle about his motives toward Dorian: "He would seek to dominate him—had already, indeed, half done so."

Readers should note the ironic contrast of Lord Henry's speeches and his actions. In Chapter 2, he advises Dorian that all influence is bad because it corrupts a person's true spirit; in this chapter, he willfully states that he intends to influence Dorian's development. At the end of the chapter, Dorian has fallen fully under the spell of Lord Henry's influence. For example, Dorian backs out of his afternoon appointment with Basil, saying, "I would sooner come with you [Lord Henry]; yes, I feel I must come with you."

The luncheon, which spans the bulk of the chapter and does little to progress the plot or enlighten the reader, seems to have been devised to entertain the reader and show off Lord Henry's clever table talk. Lord Henry is witty, but it is no accident that friends of Wilde recognized several of the author's favorite lines as they came out of Lord Henry's mouth.

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- **indolence** laziness.
 - **Isabella** refers to Isabella II (1830–1904), Queen of Spain from 1833 until the revolution of 1868.
 - **Prim** D. Juan Prim (1814–70) was a military leader and statesman in Spain who played a major role in deposing Queen Isabella in 1868.
 - **collieries** coal mines.
 - **English Blue Book** an official publication of the British government, so called for the color of its covers; a social registry.
 - **subaltern** the lowest rank of military officer.
 - **jarvies** slang for cabmen.
 - **protégé** French, a person whose training and welfare are under the influence of a mentor.
 - **Dryad** Greek mythology, a wood nymph.
 - **Plato** (d. 347 B.C.), Greek philosopher.
 - **Buonarotti** Michelangelo Buonarotti, better known as simply "Michelangelo" (1475–1564), Italian painter, sculptor, and architect.
 - **supercilious** disdainful, scornful, acting superior.

CHAPTER 4

Summary

A month later, Dorian waits for Lord Henry in Henry's library at Mayfair. He is sulking and annoyed until someone at the door interrupts his mood. It is not Lord Henry, but his wife. Lady Henry is familiar with Dorian, having seen Lord Henry's photographs of the young man and having noticed Dorian with Lord Henry recently at the opera. In her brief appearance, Lady Henry seems as witty as her husband and equally indifferent toward convention.

Lord Henry enters, complaining about the hours he has spent trying to bargain for a piece of elegant fabric: "Nowadays people know the price of everything and the value of nothing." After Lady Henry leaves, he comments lightly on the disappointments of marriage, and Dorian volunteers that he doubts that he will ever marry because he is too much in love with an actress named Sibyl Vane. He recounts his discovery of Sibyl in "an absurd little theatre" in the East End of London.

He had gone out one evening to seek adventure, recalling Lord Henry's advice that the search for beauty was "the real secret of life." In front of a theatre was a "hideous Jew," named Mr. Isaacs. Dorian was so amused with the man that he paid an entire guinea for a private theatre box. The play was Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. When Juliet, played by Sibyl Vane, walked onto the stage, her voice and performance were as magnificent as her appearance, and Dorian was immediately smitten. After that first night, he returned to the theatre every evening to see Sibyl Vane excel in various leading roles.

Lord Henry offers a few skeptical remarks about Dorian's dramatic description of his newfound love, but he does not oppose his young friend's choice to love the actress. Dorian is concerned that Lord Henry will assume that all actresses are "horrid people with dyed hair and painted faces." In one of his better comebacks, Lord Henry quietly advises, "Don't run down dyed hair and painted faces."

The love-struck Dorian tells of meeting Sibyl Vane, who immediately dubbed him "Prince Charming." He laments that the actress is bound to work for Mr. Isaacs, vowing to liberate her and present her properly at a more reputable West End theatre. As

Dorian describes Sibyl and his love for her, Dorian admits that he is entranced partly because Sibyl Vane is an actress and, thus, a different woman every night. He confesses his love for Sibyl, calling her a "genius," and in the next breath states that he doesn't really care who she is or where she came from. From his own description, Dorian's "love" for Sibyl has more to do with the affectations of her profession than with her as a person.

Lord Henry remains detached about Dorian's romance. However, he does agree to meet Dorian and Basil for dinner and to see Sibyl Vane in a play the next evening.

Dorian leaves for the theatre, and Lord Henry muses on the situation. He feels "not the slightest pang of annoyance or jealousy" that Sibyl may intervene in their growing friendship; rather, these new developments make his protégé "a more interesting study." Eventually, his valet interrupts this reverie, and Lord Henry dresses to go out for dinner. When he returns home after midnight, he finds a telegram on the hall table. It is from Dorian: He is engaged to be married to Sibyl Vane.

Commentary

Of primary interest in this chapter is the development of Dorian's character. Throughout the first three chapters, Lord Henry was the center of attention; Dorian was little more than a pretty face who envied his own portrait and was devoted to his mentor. In Chapter 4, however, Dorian begins to take over the novel. He comes into his own as a character, beginning to drive the plot of the story by acting independently of Lord Henry. His pronouncements, however, echo Lord Henry's, an indication that he is still very much under Lord Henry's influence. At least twice, the reader hears that an adage spoken by the protégé—Dorian—was originally spoken by the mentor—Lord Henry. However, Dorian's relationship with Sibyl Vane, superficial and immature as it may be, illustrates a burgeoning independence. It will soon lead to crisis and force more changes on the title character.

Dorian has not just fallen in love with an actress; he has fallen in love with her performances. He does not know the girl at all; yet, by the end of the chapter, they are engaged to be married. His ambition is not to build a relationship but to develop a star. If Dorian has learned nothing else from Lord Henry, he has learned

the joy of manipulation. He wants to become Sibyl Vane's agent, not her husband. That Dorian's first love is so flawed with selfishness and manipulation is a bright indicator of the emerging dark side of his nature.

As for Lord Henry, he may not be jealous of Dorian's love interest, but he is somewhat skeptical. He feels that Dorian is "premature," noting early on that an actress is a "rather commonplace *début*" for a young man entering the world of romance, but he quickly drops that approach when he sees how intensely in love Dorian is. Lord Henry is wise enough to avoid confrontation. However, he must be stunned by the telegram announcing the engagement.

A modern audience might find one disturbing factor in the chapter. Mr. Isaacs, who runs the theatre and holds Sibyl Vane under contract, is described in such flagrantly racist terms that the reader cannot ignore them. Someone might argue, in Wilde's defense, that he describes one *specific* Jew, not necessarily a stereotype. A better defense is that Dorian is speaking, not Wilde, and the crude, racist observations may be early indications of Dorian's character. Certainly, the young man can be superficial. It may be unfair to conclude that the narrator's views are Wilde's views. However, either way, anti-Semitism was thriving in nineteenth-century England as well as in much of the rest of Europe, as witnessed in Charles Dickens' portrayal of Fagin in *Oliver Twist* or in the real-life Dreyfus affair in France.

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- **Louis Quatorze** Louis XIV (1638–1715), King of France (1643–1715), known as "the Sun King." The novel's reference is to a style of furniture.
 - **Wagner** Wilhelm Richard Wagner (1813–83), German poet and composer, known for his stirring, nationalistic music.
 - **brocade** a heavy fabric interwoven with a raised design.
 - **frangipanni** (sometimes spelled "frangipani") a tropical American shrub with fragrant flowers; perfume from or resembling the flowers.
 - **début** French, meaning "beginning" or "coming out."
 - **abstruse** difficult to understand; obscure.
 - **rouge** French, meaning "red," "lipstick," or "rouge"; artificial blush for facial cheeks.

- **esprit** French, "spirit" or "wit"; usually spelled "*esprit*."
- **Piccadilly** a thoroughfare in London running from the Haymarket to Hyde Park Corner.
- **myriad** a large, indefinite number.
- ***les grandpères ont toujours tort*** French, meaning "Grandfathers are always wrong."
- **hautboy** an oboe.
- **Juliet** the leading female role in William Shakespeare's (1564–1616) *Romeo and Juliet*.
- **Rosalind** a leading role in William Shakespeare's *As You Like It*.
- **munificent** very generous.
- **greenroom** a waiting room or lounge in a theatre, used by performers when off-stage.
- **Lady Capulet** the mother of Juliet in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.
- **Giordano Bruno** (1548?–1600) Italian philosopher.
- **staccato** here, rapid, short, crisp words.
- **efficacy** ability to produce a specific effect.

CHAPTER 5

Summary

The following day, Sibyl Vane and her mother discuss the girl's relationship with "Prince Charming." Sibyl is elated and wants her mother to share her joy. She is in love.

Mrs. Vane's attitude is more realistic and down-to-earth. She wants her daughter to think of her career. The situation is complicated by the fact that the Vanes owe Mr. Isaacs fifty pounds, a good deal of money, as Mrs. Vane points out. On the other hand, Mrs. Vane is willing to consider marriage for Sibyl if it turns out that Dorian is wealthy.

Sibyl has all the idealistic enthusiasm of an innocent seventeen-year-old. In one of Wilde's more effective metaphors, he says that the "joy of a caged bird was in her voice." Sibyl does not want to hear about Mr. Isaacs or money. What is money compared to

love? She wonders only what "Prince Charming" sees in her. The Vanes still do not even know Dorian's name.

Sibyl's sixteen-year-old brother, James, who is about to sail for Australia, enters the room. He is very angry—toward London, toward England's class system, toward the life that he lives.

Mrs. Vane feels ill at ease around her son, fearing that he might suspect some secret that she keeps. Sibyl, however, is even more girlish, sweet, and innocent around her brother. Lovingly calling him "a dreadful old bear," she is delighted that he will go for a walk with her in the park on his last afternoon at home. For his part, James is very protective of Sibyl and repeatedly warns his mother to watch over the girl in his absence.

During their walk in the park, James is brooding and angry; Sibyl dreams of "Prince Charming" and fantasizes aloud, in a somewhat childlike manner, about the great success that her brother is to be.

James hates the "young dandy" who is courting his sister, hates him the more because he is a "gentleman." He warns his sister that the man wants to enslave her and repeatedly threatens to kill the "gentleman" if he does Sibyl any wrong. James is especially angry when Dorian suddenly passes through the park in an open carriage, but only Sibyl actually sees him. James is also angry with his mother. At the theatre one night, months before, he had heard "a whispered sneer" about her.

After James and Sibyl return from their walk, he confronts his mother. He wants to know if she and his father were actually married.

The crude situation reminds the melodramatic Mrs. Vane of a bad rehearsal. She simply says, "No." James accuses the father of being a scoundrel. Mrs. Vane defends the man, now dead. She knew that he was "not free" when she got involved with him. He would have taken care of her and the children had he lived. He was, after all, a "gentleman." James insists that Sibyl never be told about the father and notes that his sister's suitor is another "gentleman." He repeats that he will track down Sibyl's "gentleman" caller and "kill him like a dog" if he wrongs the girl, a threat that becomes very important later in the book.

Commentary

The absence of Dorian or Lord Henry from this chapter may make it seem like filler, a chance for the reader to catch a breath after the whirlwind engagement announcement that ended the previous chapter. However, this short chapter serves an important function in the novel; it introduces and describes characters and sets up events that will be developed later in the story.

Sibyl is the ingénue, an innocent girl, and the reader would be hard pressed to find another character in the book as sweet or innocent or wholesome. She is no match for the jaded, sophisticated world of Lord Henry and Dorian. Her pure joy at being in love provides poignant contrast to the manipulative intentions that Dorian calls "love."

It is little wonder that James is enraged at the thought of any harm coming to his sister. He is the adventurer, off to see the world, but the reader has to suspect that all the anger about class distinction and all those threats about killing people might eventually come to something.

Mrs. Vane is the fallen woman with a crusty exterior but a good heart. She was ill-treated by the wealthy, privileged, married man who fathered her children. Because Sibyl has fallen in love with a gentleman just as her mother did, the reader can't help but wonder if her romance will end as tragically as her mother's.

Mr. Isaacs, whom Wilde introduced in an earlier chapter, is the creditor to whom the Vane family is indebted. When Sibyl says that Isaacs is not a gentleman and that she hates the way that he talks to her, the reader needs no further explanation of his character. Sibyl and her mother live in desperate circumstances, and Sibyl could easily fall hopelessly, blindly in love with a young man as charming as her Prince.

The only thing missing from this list of characters is the suitor—Dorian. Will he be the hero, a true gentleman who saves the family and carries off Sibyl to live happily ever after? Or will he be a cad?

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- **bismuth** a white, crystalline, metallic element used in alloys to form castings; here, used as powder.
 - **querulous** expressing complaint.

- **tableau** French, "picture"; a scene on stage in which the actors remain silent and motionless as if in a picture.
- **affluence** a plentiful supply of wealth or goods.
- **super-cargo** an officer on a merchant ship who is in charge of the cargo.
- **morose** gloomy; very melancholy; sullen.
- **dogma** a system of beliefs supported by authority.
- **victoria** a low, light, four-wheeled carriage for two with a folding top and an elevated driver's seat in front.
- **four-in-hand** a vehicle, pulled by four horses, driven by one person.
- **Achilles** the hero of Homer's *Illiad*.
- **articles** the articles of agreement, or contract, signed by James, to undergo the journey to Australia.
- **drudgee** a person who does tedious or menial labor.

CHAPTER 6

Summary & Commentary

This transitional chapter is one of the shortest in the book: It encapsulates what has happened already and anticipates what is to follow.

The setting for the chapter is a small private dining room at the Bristol. Lord Henry greets Basil as he enters and then immediately asks if he has heard that Dorian is engaged to be married. Basil is stunned but asks to whom. Lord Henry responds with the unflattering explanation, "To some little actress or other."

Basil is genuinely upset by the news of Dorian's engagement. At first, he is incredulous, stating that Dorian is much too sensible to do such a foolish thing. Lord Henry, with a typically paradoxical aphorism, says, "Dorian is far too wise not to do foolish things now and then, dear Basil." He adds that Dorian is engaged, not married; that the girl apparently is beautiful, which Lord Henry views as one of the highest virtues, and that he himself does not approve or disapprove of this situation or any other. Lord Henry explains that life is not for making such judgments. Every experience is of some worth, he suggests, and Dorian may be more interesting even if he

does marry—provided, of course, that he finds a good mistress in six months or so. The problem with marriage is that it often makes people unselfish, according to Lord Henry, and unselfish people lose their individuality. The purpose of life is to know oneself. Marriage may get in the way of that, but it does not have to.

When Dorian arrives, he is giddy with love. The previous night, Sibyl played Rosalind (in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*) and was mesmerizing as she transported Dorian from the dingy London theatre into the world of the play.

Backstage after the performance, the lovers unexpectedly kissed, and Sibyl, trembling, fell to her knees and kissed Dorian's hands. They are engaged—and will marry even if Dorian must wait until he is of legal age in less than a year. Significantly, Dorian ends his recollection by stating, almost boasting, that he has embraced Rosalind and "kissed Juliet on the mouth," repeating his identification of Sibyl with the characters that she plays.

Basil is overwhelmed. Lord Henry, on the other hand, behaves like a shrewd lawyer and asks at what specific point the word "marriage" was mentioned. It is his contention that women usually introduce the term, however subtly, when things get sufficiently cozy. In short, women propose to men even though the man may not realize it.

In this case, apparently he is right. Dorian is upset at the insinuation and asserts that it was not a "business transaction." True, there had been no formal proposal. He told the girl that he loved her, and she responded that she was "not worthy to be my wife." To Sibyl, the situation was tantamount to a proposal to her. Dorian goes so far as to state that he regrets everything that Lord Henry has taught him. Certainly Lord Henry's cynical, egocentric world is no place for Sibyl. In a statement of one of the major themes of the novel, Lord Henry submits that being in harmony with oneself is a key to life, echoing the tenet of Aestheticism that calls for the individual to make of his own life a work of art.

It is time to leave for the theatre. Lord Henry and Dorian leave together, as they did at the end of Chapter 2; Basil follows them separately in another carriage. The artist feels that Dorian will never be the same to him again.

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- **Messalina** third wife of Claudius I of Rome (10 B.C.–54 A.D.); she was noted for lascivious behavior.

- **narcissus** This narrow-leafed plant with its white or yellow, trumpet-shaped blossom, is an apt flower for Dorian to adore. It is named for Narcissus of Greek mythology, a young man who spurned the attentions of Echo and fell in love with his own image in a pool of water; he was turned into the flower.
- **Arden** a forest in *As You Like It*, in which Sibyl performed the previous night.
- **Verona** a city in northeastern Italy, the setting for *Romeo and Juliet*, in which Sibyl will perform that night.
- **prig** a person who is overly precise, arrogant, or smug.
- **brougham** a four-wheeled, closed carriage with an open driver's seat in front.

CHAPTER 7

Summary

The theatre is crowded when Dorian, Basil, and Lord Henry arrive. When Sibyl appears onstage as Juliet, Lord Henry thinks she is one of the "loveliest creatures" he has seen, fawn-like in her grace and innocence. Her performance, however, is worse than disappointing. She seems listless and artificial; in fact, she is absolutely awful.

Dorian is more disgusted than embarrassed by Sybil's acting. Lord Henry and Basil leave, as does half the audience, but Dorian sits through the entire play.

In the greenroom after the play is finished, Sibyl seems overjoyed at her dismal performance and expects Dorian to understand that she can no longer act because she has found true love in real life. She intended to be outstanding, she says, but because Dorian has taught her "what reality really is," she no longer can believe in the fake world of plays. She asks Dorian to take her away so that they might begin their life together.

Dorian's response is cold and filled with disgust: "You have killed my love," he mutters. He loved her because she was a great performer, he says. Now he finds her "shallow and stupid" and can barely stand her.

Sibyl is distraught. Apologizing for her bad performance, she pleads with Dorian to give her another chance. Sobbing, she falls to the floor and begs him not to leave her. As she cries hysterically, she begins to recount her brother's threat to kill anyone who harms her, but she shakes off the thought, reminding herself out loud that the threat was just a joke.

Dorian is annoyed with Sybil and tells her that he cannot see her anymore. Abruptly, he leaves. Dorian wanders the streets until near dawn and then returns home. Passing through his library toward his bedroom, he notices the portrait that Basil painted of him. He is startled and puzzled, but he goes on into his bedroom. He begins to undress but pauses and returns to the library to look at the portrait. To Dorian, the face in the portrait has slightly changed, taking on a look of cruelty around the mouth. Going to the window, he sees a bright dawn. He looks again at the painting. The "lines of cruelty round the mouth" are still there, even more clearly than before. Looking at his reflection in a mirror, Dorian looks fresh and youthful. Suddenly he recalls the wish he earlier made at Basil's studio, that he might remain the same while the picture took on the "lines of suffering and thought," the various signs of corruption and age that Dorian's life might bring him. He thinks that such a wish could never be fulfilled. Surely it is impossible.

Still, there are the cruel lines about the mouth in the portrait. Dorian begins to wonder if he really has been cruel to Sibyl. However, he convinces himself that he is not to blame for the situation. Sibyl is to blame because she disappointed him and made him endure the three painful hours of her terrible performance. Eventually, he convinces himself that Sibyl hadn't really loved him, and he concludes that he needn't be concerned about her at all.

Dorian is more concerned about the changed portrait than with Sibyl. It occurs to Dorian that every sin he commits will be reflected in the face on the canvas. He vows never to sin again so that the painting, like himself, will never change. He vows to use the portrait as his conscience; the danger of hurting the portrait will keep him from committing sins. He will refuse to see Lord Henry or at least will ignore Lord Henry's "subtle poisonous theories." He will return to Sibyl, apologize, and marry her. He pulls a screen in front of the painting and walks outside. The chapter ends as Dorian repeats Sibyl's name into the dawn.

Commentary

In Chapter 7, Dorian's narrative supercedes all others in the novel. From now on, it will be his story, not Lord Henry's. The novel becomes more dynamic because Dorian's character grows—changes—while Lord Henry's remains unchanged.

The change in Dorian's character in this chapter is dramatic. Dorian begins the chapter as a dedicated lover. Then, in a few short pages, he becomes a disgusted critic, a heartless deserter, briefly a contrite sinner, and then finally a lover rededicated to Sibyl—not because he loves the woman, but because he fears hurting himself and the portrait. Even though the chapter ends with Dorian intending to do "his duty" by being honorable and marrying Sibyl, his honor is false because it is based on selfishness. His "honorable intentions" are simply a continuation of his soul's degradation. The number and degree of changes that Dorian goes through in this chapter, most of them negative changes, hint at the turn his nature will take in the rest of the book.

Chapter 7 also introduces an element that will reoccur throughout the story: the changing of the portrait. By the end of the chapter, the reader understands that the portrait will symbolize the state of Dorian's soul and spirit. Wilde will use the portrait to help develop his characterization of Dorian for the rest of the book.

Dorian's special relationship with his portrait continues the Faust theme. His wish about the portrait suggests a pact with the devil. Dorian's desire to escape the "poisonous theories" of Lord Henry indicates that he sees his mentor as an evil, devil-like influence, but, like Faust, Dorian seems eager to benefit from the fruits of his pact, namely the eternal youth that the portrait offers him.

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- **Miranda** a leading character in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.
 - **Caliban** a savage who is half-man, half-beast in *The Tempest*.
 - **tawdry** gaudy; cheap; vulgarly ornamental.
 - **listless** lacking energy or effort.
 - **Good pilgrim . . . holy palmer's kiss** a quote from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Act I, Scene 5, 99–102.
 - **Thou knowest . . . speak tonight** a quote from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Act II, Scene 2, 85–87.

- **elocution** the art of public speaking.
- **Although I joy . . . when next we meet** a quote from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Act II, Scene 2, 116-22.
- **Portia** a leading character in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*.
- **Beatrice** a leading character in William Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*.
- **Cordelia** a leading character in William Shakespeare's *King Lear*.
- **nacre** mother-of-pearl.

CHAPTER 8

Summary

That afternoon, Dorian receives a letter from Lord Henry, but he sets it aside without opening it.

Later, Dorian wonders if his portrait has really changed like he thought. Surely not, he thinks of the portrait, hidden behind a screen. Finally, when he builds up his courage and looks at the portrait, he sees that the portrait *has* changed, just as he remembered. He speculates on the cause, fearing a "terrible reason."

The altered portrait forces Dorian to acknowledge his cruelty to Sibyl Vane. It is a "symbol of the degradation of sin" and will serve as his guide, his conscience. He composes a long letter to Sibyl in which he accuses himself of madness and begs her forgiveness. As he finishes writing the letter, Dorian feels absolved of his cruelty to Sibyl.

Lord Henry knocks on the library door and insists on speaking to Dorian. Lord Henry seems unusually consoling but advises Dorian not to dwell on the situation concerning Sibyl, which he explains is "dreadful" but not Dorian's fault. He asks Dorian questions about the previous night: Did Dorian meet Sibyl backstage? Was there a scene? He is pleased when Dorian says that he is not sorry for what happened.

Dorian, however, continues. He is not sorry because the matter has taught him a lesson. He tells Lord Henry of his plans to make amends and marry Sibyl.

Lord Henry, quite agitated, interrupts and asks if Dorian received his letter. Dorian admits that the letter did arrive but that he has not opened it. Lord Henry then tells Dorian the contents of his letter: Sibyl Vane is dead.

Dorian is in shock but asks to hear the whole story. Lord Henry reports that the death was clearly *not* an accident. About half-past midnight, Sibyl and her mother were leaving the theatre. Sibyl excused herself, saying she had left something upstairs. When she did not return, the people at the theatre checked and found her on the floor of her dressing room, dead from ingesting poison.

Lord Henry is concerned with keeping Dorian out of the scandal. He asks Dorian to spend the evening with him at the opera so that the unpleasantness of the suicide does not get on Dorian's nerves.

Lord Henry need not be concerned for Dorian's nerves. Dorian admits that he murdered Sibyl, "murdered her as surely as if I had cut her little throat," but he continues to say, in a detached manner, that the whole affair seems too "wonderful for tears." Instead of feeling remorse over Sibyl's death, Dorian muses that his first love letter was written to a dead girl. Within only a few seconds, he concludes that Sibyl's suicide was very selfish of her; it leaves him without the guidance that marriage to her might have provided.

Lord Henry offers several glib comments on marriage and specifically on what a disaster this marriage would have been. Dorian wonders why he "cannot feel this tragedy" as much as he thinks he should and wonders if he is heartless. The death of Sibyl seems like "a wonderful ending to a wonderful play" to Dorian. Lord Henry, "who found an exquisite pleasure in playing on the lad's unconscious egotism," is pleased to extend the simile. He assures Dorian that he is not heartless; the experience has been like a brilliant play, and Dorian should regard the whole matter as if he were a spectator at the theater.

Lord Henry approves that he is living in a century when "such wonders" as Sibyl's death could happen. When Dorian interrupts that he was "terribly cruel" to Sibyl, Lord Henry assures him that women "appreciate cruelty, downright cruelty, more than anything else."

Dorian confesses that he has felt everything that Lord Henry has said but was afraid to admit it, even to himself. Assured by his mentor that his "extraordinary good looks" will present him with a rich life, Dorian thanks the older man and calls him his "best friend."

After Lord Henry leaves, Dorian checks the portrait, which has not changed since earlier in the day. Apparently the portrait registers events as they happen. Dorian wishes that he could actually observe it changing. For a moment, he feels remorse toward Sibyl, but he brushes the feeling away. Vowing to go on, seeking "eternal youth, infinite passion, pleasures subtle and secret, wild joys and wilder sins," he briefly considers praying that the spell of the portrait be broken. However, he rationalizes that the spell is not his to control. Besides, who would not want eternal youth? He decides to enjoy the situation: "Not one blossom of his loveliness would ever fade." He again covers the painting with the screen. Within an hour, he has joined Lord Henry at the opera.

Commentary

In Chapter 8, Dorian struggles briefly with his conscience. Under Lord Henry's influence, it is no contest: By the end of the chapter, Dorian has dedicated himself entirely to the pursuit of pleasure and sin. He throws away the last scraps of his conscience and becomes a completely selfish being. By the time he goes to the opera with Lord Henry, he doesn't even feel protective about the portrait, which up to this point was the one thing that he still cared about. Lord Henry's sole concern is to protect Dorian's reputation and to urge him to get on with his life. He cares not a whit for the young Sybil and instead speaks superficially about fashion, women, and the convenience of Sibyl's death. He views the whole affair as a splendid artistic experience. His reaction is in line with the cynicism that the reader has observed in his character all along; Lord Henry's ability to make Sibyl's death a trivial matter in Dorian's mind demonstrates that his cynicism and his power to influence Dorian have reached new heights.

The flippant, carefree attitudes that Dorian and Lord Henry display in this chapter caused many people to accuse Oscar Wilde of writing an immoral book when *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was first published. However, the reader needs to distinguish between an author and his characters. Certainly Lord Henry and Dorian

often behave like scoundrels, but continuing the Faust theme, Lord Henry is demonic and Dorian blindly does his bidding. He knows exactly how to appeal to Dorian's weaknesses, of which there are plenty. Still, these two are *both* despicable fellows. The reader might admire or envy parts of their lives, but at this point it is very difficult to like them.

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- **Sèvres** an exquisite porcelain made in Sèvres, France.
 - **Louis-Quinze** Louis the Fifteenth (1710–74), king of France 1715–74; a fashion style named after him.
 - **sanguine** healthy looking; optimistic.
 - **absolution** formal remission of sin after confession; in the Roman Catholic church, it is a part of the sacrament of penance.
 - **prussic acid** hydrocyanic acid; a colorless, extremely poisonous solution of hydrogen cyanide (HCN).
 - **Patti** Adelina Patti (1843–1919), world-renowned Italian coloratura soprano.
 - **dowdy** shabby; lacking style or neatness.
 - **nil** a contraction of the Latin *nihil*, "nothing."
 - **asphodel** a Mediterranean plant that in Greek mythology is linked with death.
 - **conjugal** having to do with marriage.
 - **felicity** blissful happiness.
 - **Desdemona** a leading character in William Shakespeare's *Othello*.
 - **Ophelia** a leading character in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.
 - **Jacobean** relating to drama or literature during the reign of James I of England (1603–25).
 - **Webster** John Webster (1580–1625), English dramatist and tragedian whom many rate second only to Shakespeare in the early seventeenth century.
 - **Ford** John Ford (c. 1586–1639), major English dramatist.
 - **Cyril Tourneur** (1575–1626), British dramatist and tragedian.

CHAPTER 9

Summary

While Dorian breakfasts the next morning, Basil arrives, upset about Sibyl's death and concerned for Dorian. Basil had come by Dorian's home the night before but was told that Dorian was at the opera. Basil cannot believe that Dorian could have gone to the opera so soon after Sibyl's suicide, and he is concerned that "one tragedy might be followed by another."

Dorian is bored and indifferent about Sybil. He tells Basil that Sibyl's mother has a son but that he has no idea how the woman is faring. Beyond that, he wants no more talk of "horrid subjects." Instead, he asks about Basil's paintings.

Basil is astonished at Dorian's indifference. He asks Dorian how he could attend the opera while Sibyl Vane lay dead but not yet buried. Dorian tries to interrupt. Echoing his mentor, Lord Henry, he observes that a person who is "master of himself can end a sorrow as easily as he can invent a pleasure."

Basil continues, saying that Dorian's attitude is "horrible." He accuses Dorian of having no heart and blames the change in Dorian on Lord Henry's influence.

Dorian retorts that he owes "a great deal" to Lord Henry, more than he owes to Basil, who "only taught me to be vain." Basil sadly responds, "Well, I am punished for that, Dorian—or shall be some day," a major foreshadowing of events to come in the novel.

Basil is even more distraught when he learns that Sibyl's death was a suicide. Dorian, however, again echoes Lord Henry by calling Sibyl's death "one of the great romantic tragedies of the age." Besides, Dorian points out, he did grieve; however, he recalls, it soon passed. He repeats a self-serving anecdote about his own life and concedes that he has indeed changed. He admits that Basil may be "better" than Lord Henry, but the latter is stronger. Basil, he concludes, is too afraid of life.

The subject turns to art. Dorian asks Basil to make a drawing of Sibyl, and Basil agrees to try making the portrait. More importantly, he asks Dorian to sit for him again. That would be impossible, says Dorian. Basil then asks to see the portrait because he now plans to exhibit it in Paris.

Dorian is horrified that Basil wants to exhibit the portrait; he fears that his secret would be revealed to the whole world. Dorian reminds Basil of his promise never to exhibit the portrait and asks why he has changed his mind. Basil explains that he didn't want to exhibit the portrait for fear that others might see his feelings for Dorian in it. Since that time, he has come to the conclusion that "art conceals the artist far more completely than it ever reveals him," and that he doesn't fear others seeing the portrait. Basil finally agrees not to exhibit the portrait and leaves.

At the end of the chapter, Dorian marvels at how he was spared from telling his own secret and, instead, managed to manipulate his friend into telling his secret. He vows to keep the portrait hidden away forever.

Commentary

Wilde uses this chapter to continue his character development of both Basil and Dorian. Basil shows himself to be a decent, caring human being who is as concerned for Sibyl and her mother as he is for Dorian. Unlike Lord Henry, he does not encourage Dorian to turn away from the girl's death or treat it like some entertaining fantasy. In a moment of heightened irony, Dorian accuses Basil of being "too much afraid of life." In fact, *Dorian* is afraid that Basil will see the portrait and thus learn of his secret pact.

As for Dorian, he shows himself to be fully immersed in his new life of selfishness and manipulation. For example, when Dorian learns of Basil's strange admiration for him, an admiration that has obviously had a major impact on Basil, Dorian is simply pleased to be adored by Basil. As he wonders if he will ever feel that way toward someone, it becomes evident that he already does—while he respects Lord Henry, Dorian only adores himself. When he gets Basil to admit his secret without having to reveal his own, he feels pleasure at having manipulated the situation so completely to his own advantage. His decision at the end of the chapter to hide the painting reveals his commitment to a life of vanity and self-gratification.

Wilde also shows the reader the tension that Dorian feels about keeping his pact a secret. Dorian becomes gripped with raging fear when he hears that Basil wants to see the painting and to show it to

others—he is so afraid that he actually breaks into a sweat. Dorian's fear points to an important theme in the book: A life devoted solely to the pursuit of selfish pleasure will always be marred by self-conscious fear. Dorian has what he wants—eternal youth and a life filled with pleasure—but he can't fully enjoy his life for fear that his secret will be discovered. Dorian's fear in this chapter is the first sign that Dorian's new life will be a study in disappointment.

Readers should note that this chapter contains several ironic allusions that become important later in the story. For example, Dorian makes a fleeting and flippant reference about Sibyl's brother; when Dorian mentions James, the reader is reminded of the brother's promise to kill anyone who harms Sybil. The repeated references to the brother remind the reader of his presence and foreshadow his later reemergence in the book. As the novel progresses, the reader also will see the irony in Dorian's statement that he would turn to Basil in a time of trouble.

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- **martyr** one who suffers death rather than compromise principles; one who sacrifices greatly.
 - **philanthropist** one who attempts to benefit mankind through charitable aid.
 - **ennui** French, "boredom."
 - **misanthrope** a person who scorns or hates mankind.
 - **Gautier** Théophile Gautier (1811–72), French poet and critic.
 - **la consolation des arts** French, "the consolation of the arts."
 - **pallid** ashen, or pale.
 - **Paris** in Greek mythology, the son of King Priam of Troy and his wife, Hecuba; his choice of Helen as the winner of a beauty contest, and his refusal to return her, caused the Trojan War; later, he shot the arrow that caused the death of Achilles.
 - **Adonis** in Greek mythology, a youth of astonishing beauty, favored by the goddess of love, Aphrodite.
 - **Adrian** Publius Aelius Hadrianus (76–138 A.D.), popularly known as Hadrian, or Adrian, Roman emperor (117–38 A.D.); had strong ties to Egypt and lost a close friend to drowning in the Nile.
 - **panegyrics** praise.

CHAPTER 10

Summary

For most of this chapter, Dorian is concerned with moving the portrait to an attic room where it will be safely hidden. He calls for Victor, his servant, who enters the room. It occurs to Dorian that the servant has had access to the portrait and may have looked behind the screen. He tells Victor to summon the housekeeper, Mrs. Leaf, and then to go to Mr. Hubbard, the frame maker, and ask him to send over two of his men.

From Mrs. Leaf, Dorian wants the key to his old schoolroom, a spacious attic area. Mrs. Leaf wants to clean the schoolroom before Dorian sees it; Dorian finally secures the key and sends Mrs. Leaf away. Dorian locates a piece of richly-colored fabric with which to cover the portrait. Ironically, the fabric previously had been used to cover coffins, and Dorian contemplates that it will now conceal the death and degeneration of the portrait. For a moment, he wonders if he should have confessed his secret to Basil after all and asked his assistance in escaping Lord Henry's influence. He realizes that Basil could have saved him from the sins he will surely commit, but he decides that it is "too late now." The future looks inevitably bleak to Dorian.

Dorian covers it just before Victor returns with the movers. Dorian is suspicious of Victor, worried that he may discover the secret of the portrait and blackmail him. He sends the servant on another errand to get him out of the house, carrying a note to Lord Henry requesting reading material and reminding his mentor of dinner plans that evening. Mr. Hubbard arrives with a rugged-looking assistant, and the two men carry the painting up the stairs to the schoolroom.

When Dorian reaches the attic, he is flooded with childhood memories and regrets having to leave the portrait there to decay. However, the attic is the most secure and private place for it because Dorian has the only key to the room. He briefly considers that his nature might improve and that the evil already lurking in his soul may pass. Even so, the portrait will age, and Dorian hates the hideousness of growing old. He continues with his plans to conceal the portrait.

After the movers leave, Dorian locks the door to the schoolroom and goes down to the library. Victor has already returned, leaving Dorian's tea and, from Lord Henry, a note, a well-worn book bound in yellow paper, and a newspaper. In the newspaper, Lord Henry has marked an article regarding the inquest into the death of Sibyl Vane. Dorian finds the article about Sibyl's death horribly ugly, and he frets that ugliness makes things seem too real. He is annoyed with Lord Henry for marking the article, which Victor may have noticed. Still, he reasons that he shouldn't worry about Victor reading the article because *he* did not kill the girl.

Dorian finds the book more interesting. He begins reading, and in a short time he is engrossed by it. The book tells a story in which the sins of the world seem to be passing in review before him. Fascinated by this novel with no plot and only one character, he reads until Victor reminds him of his appointment with Lord Henry. Finally, Dorian dresses for dinner.

When Dorian meets Lord Henry at the club, Lord Henry seems quietly pleased—and not at all surprised—that Dorian should like the book that he sent to him.

Commentary

Throughout the first half of this chapter, Dorian is fraught with paranoia and fear that Victor will discover the secret of the portrait. Continuing the theme that was established in the preceding chapter, Dorian isn't enjoying the life he has chosen—even though he craves it more than anything. Instead of a life of glorious exploration and passion, he spends his time scheming and worrying.

Dorian seals his commitment to a life of vanity and debauchery when he hides and locks the portrait in the attic schoolroom. He rationalizes that he might, in fact, become more virtuous and reverse the moral decay reflected in the picture, but even he seems to know that will never happen. He seems to be thoroughly infected with the cynicism that Lord Henry has shown throughout the book; Dorian has been a good student of his mentor. It is enough for Dorian that he would wither and age without the portrait. He cannot and will not destroy the picture or attempt to negate the Faustian contract, if only because of his obsession with youthful beauty.

The first ten chapters of the novel cover a time span of about a month after Dorian and Lord Henry meet. In that time, Lord Henry's influence increases, and Dorian changes significantly. As Basil points out, Dorian is not the innocent, well-meaning young man who first posed for him. With Lord Henry's encouragement, Dorian has become self-absorbed and cruel. At first, Dorian may not have been aware of the seriousness of his wish to remain youthful while the portrait aged. By the time that he hides the portrait in the attic, however, he has every reason to know the consequences. He knows that the pact will "breed horrors and yet will never die."

In this chapter, Dorian seems resigned to his fate. As in the Faust legends, the central character seems to feel beyond hope. According to the Faust legend, he could save himself if he would only repent and seek absolution. Dorian does consider turning to Basil, confessing, and seeking a more enlightened path. His ultimate decision, however, is not just based on despair. True to the Faust legend, he truly craves the benefits of the bargain.

Having chosen, Dorian immediately falls under the power of the "yellow book" sent by Lord Henry. It is well-worn, and the reader can assume that Lord Henry knows its contents and anticipates its effect on Dorian. Dorian is enthralled by the story and immediately adopts it as a blueprint for his life. Note that Wilde ironically chooses a book to provide the guidelines for Dorian's life of debauchery.

Wilde's devotion, even obsession, to his art is indicated by an incident regarding Chapter 10. Although Wilde affected the airs of a dilettante, he was industrious and productive. After submitting *The Picture of Dorian Gray* for proofreading, he went to France for a much-deserved break. His editors received a startling telegram from Paris: "Stop all proofs. Wilde." The author returned in person to change the name of one character. The picture framer in the tenth chapter originally was named "Ashton." Wilde had decided that "Ashton is a gentleman's name." He changed it to "Hubbard," which he felt was more fitting for a tradesman.

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- **placid** calm, peaceful.
 - **garrulous** habitually talkative.

- **Bologna** a city in northern Italy.
- **pall** a cover for a coffin.
- **Michelangelo** Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564), Italian painter, sculptor, architect, and poet.
- **Montaigne** Michel Eyquem de Montaigne (1533–92), French author.
- **Winckelmann** Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–68), German philosopher, archaeologist, and art historian.
- **annihilated** completely destroyed.
- **inveterate** firmly established by long standing; deep-rooted.
- **impecuniosity** poverty.
- **genial** having a friendly, pleasant disposition.
- **obsequious** here, complacently complying.
- **flaccid** lacking firmness; lacking energy.
- **death by misadventure** The phrase does not specify suicide but implies some degree of fault or responsibility.
- **argot** specialized language used by a particular group.
- **Symbolistes** French, meaning “Symbolists.” The term refers to the literary and artistic movement begun by French poets in the nineteenth century that spread throughout Europe and America, influencing painting and drama; closely associated with Aestheticism, it advocated individual freedom even in themes of decay, ruin, and the bizarre.
- **wan** unnaturally pale; weary; ill.

CHAPTER 11

Summary

As the chapter begins, the narrator announces that years have passed. Dorian has spent the time developing his credo of life under the influence of the yellow book and, to a lesser degree now, Lord Henry.

Dorian's licentious behavior is the source of people's gossip, but those who see him in person dismiss such gossip because the “purity of his face” makes such tales seem impossible. Often,

Dorian creeps up to the attic to look at the figure in the portrait, now bloated, ugly, and aged. On such occasions, he laughingly contrasts his face in a mirror with that in the painting. If anything, he has become even more enamored with his good looks.

He has "mad hungers" that become "more ravenous" as he feeds them. At times he takes a room in a shabby tavern by the docks, disguising himself and using an assumed name. However, he observes his obligations in polite society and is idolized by many of the young men of his class because he lives his life surrounded by beauty. His life is his primary and most important work of art.

Dorian seeks a "new Hedonism" to combat the Puritanism of Victorian England. He wants life without obligation or regret, and he is not terribly concerned if others are hurt along the way.

Rumors grow as Dorian passes his twenty-fifth year and approaches thirty. Many find him charming; others shun him. His face, however, reveals no debauchery. His appearance is innocent. Only his soul has been "poisoned by a book."

Commentary

The bulk of Chapter 11 lists, page after page, the various pursuits of Dorian's adult life. In these lists, Wilde shows the result of Dorian's chosen path. The reader sees the peculiar kind of hell that Dorian inhabits because of his pact; Wilde delivers a strong judgment against the dangers of decadence.

The lengthy passages describing Dorian's study of perfumes, music, jewels, and embroideries border on being tedious. Wilde was too good a writer to include these passages merely to show off his knowledge of these subjects. These overly-detailed passages transport the reader into the world that Dorian has created for himself, one in which the passionate pursuit of pleasure has become a monotonous, vain, never-ending stream of meaningless and trivial debauchery. No matter how much Dorian indulges his passions, he is never satisfied. By the end of the chapter, the narrator states of Dorian, "There were moments when he looked on evil simply as a mode through which he could realise his conception of the beautiful."

Dorian's life seems to be one of floating from one passion to the next, completely at his own whim. And yet, he remains

tethered to the portrait and his fear that his secret will be discovered. He lives in a gilded cage, a prisoner of his passions and his fears.

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- **Dante** Dante Alighieri (1265–1321), Italian poet; author of *The Divine Comedy*.
 - **Eton** Eton College, a school for boys in Buckinghamshire, England.
 - **fop** a dandy; a man excessively concerned about his clothes and appearance to the exclusion of deeper values.
 - **Satyricon** "Book of Satyrlike Adventures"; a first-century-A.D. comic novel attributed to Petronius.
 - **arbiter elegantiarum** Latin, "judge of elegance."
 - **anchorite** a religious recluse.
 - **panis caelistis** Latin, "bread of Heaven."
 - **de la vieille roche** French, "of the old rock."
 - **Schubert** Franz Schubert (1797–1828), Austrian composer.
 - **Chopin** Frédéric François Chopin (1810–49), Polish pianist and composer; resident in France from 1829 until his death.
 - **Beethoven** Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827), German composer.
 - **Madame, je suis tout joyeux** French, "Madam, I am quite happy."
 - **entrées** French, "entries"; in North America, it is the main dish of the meal; in England, during Wilde's era, it was a dish served between the meat and fish courses.
 - **taedium vitae** Latin, "tedium of life."
 - **sentinel** one who keeps guard; a sentry.
 - **alchemist** one who tries to turn base metals into gold.
 - **ascetic** a person who renounces comforts to live a life of self-discipline, sometimes for a religious reason.
 - **fresco** the art of painting on fresh, moist plaster with earth colors dissolved in water and pressed into the plaster.
 - **calumnies** false statements meant to injure someone.
 - **macaroni** here, a term used in eighteenth-century England to describe a well-to-do young man who dressed in Continental fashions rather than in staid, bland English clothing.

CHAPTERS 12 & 13

Summary

It is the evening before Dorian's thirty-eighth birthday, and he has dined with Lord Henry. Around eleven o'clock, wrapped in furs against the cold, he walks through the heavy fog toward home. Basil passes him on the street from the opposite direction. Dorian, not eager to encounter the old friend, continues toward his house; Basil, however, turns and quickly catches up.

Basil plans to leave for Paris, catching a night train to the English Channel. He feels fortunate to find Dorian since he must talk with him and has been waiting for him at Dorian's home. Dorian and Basil go to Dorian's home.

Basil, discussing Dorian's reputation, notes that horrible things are being said about his young friend. Dorian's friendship seems destructive or even fatal to very young men: One committed suicide; another was forced to leave England with a "tarnished name"; a third found a "dreadful end"; a fourth lost his career; a fifth lost his social standing.

Dorian responds with contempt. He is interested only in the scandals of others; his own so-called scandals lack "the charm of novelty." He answers that he is not responsible for the flaws of his acquaintances.

Basil persists. Dorian's effect on his friends speaks for itself. He has "filled them with a madness for pleasure." Then there is Lady Gwendolyn, Lord Henry's sister. Prior to knowing Dorian, "not a breath of scandal had ever touched her." Now, no decent lady will even drive in the park with her. The list goes on. Dorian has been seen sneaking out of "dreadful houses" and visiting "the foulest dens" in London.

Basil wants to hear Dorian deny the accusations against him. Basil says that he can't believe the rumors when he sees Dorian's innocent and pure face. However, he needs to know the truth, to see Dorian's soul; but, as Basil says, only God can do that.

Dorian laughs bitterly at Basil's preaching. He agrees to allow Basil to see his soul—the portrait. Mad with pride, he tells Basil that no one will believe it if Basil should tell them what he sees, or

they will simply admire Dorian the more. He leads Basil up the stairs to see the portrait.

In the attic schoolroom, Dorian challenges Basil: "So you think it is only God who sees the soul, Basil? Draw the curtain back, and you will see mine." Basil hesitates, and Dorian tears the curtain from its rod and flings it to the floor. Basil is horrified to see the hideous face in the painting with its evil grin. The face is recognizable as Dorian's, but it is aged and corrupt. Basil is overcome by "disgust and loathing" and asks Dorian to explain what the image in the portrait means.

Dorian recalls the wish that he made that fateful day in Basil's studio, and Basil is horrified and incredulous. Basil tries to rationalize the change in the portrait: Mildew has transformed the portrait, or perhaps the paints were fouled. Besides, Dorian had told him that he destroyed the painting. Dorian corrects him: "I was wrong. It has destroyed me." He bitterly asks if Basil can still see his "ideal" in the portrait. It is, after all, the face of Dorian's soul.

Basil is overcome with the ugliness of the portrait and collapses in a chair. He implores Dorian to pray, pointing out that if Dorian's previous prayer of pride was answered, surely his prayer of repentance will be, too.

Dorian's eyes fill with tears, and he is momentarily filled with despair. "It is too late, Basil," he answers. Basil pleads that it is *never* too late. They must repent; he, too, is guilty, but they can still be forgiven.

At that moment, Dorian looks at the portrait, and it seems to send him a command. An "uncontrollable feeling of hatred for Basil Hallward" overwhelms him. He grabs a knife lying on a nearby chest and plunges it into a large vein behind Basil's ear. He stabs his old friend repeatedly, and after a brief struggle, Basil is dead.

Quietly Dorian returns to the library and hides Basil's bag and coat in a secret closet where he keeps his disguises. Collecting his thoughts, he realizes that many men are hanged for what he has just done. However, there is little evidence against him. Basil had the odd habit of disappearing without telling people where he was going, and people will think he has gone to Paris. Feeling no remorse, Dorian quickly thinks of a plan to disguise his actions.

Carefully he leaves the house, taking care to avoid the notice of a policeman on the street. Then he turns and rings his own doorbell. It takes nearly five minutes for Francis, the valet, to answer. Dorian establishes an alibi by checking the time with Francis: ten past two in the morning. He asks if anyone visited in his absence. Francis says that Mr. Hallward stayed until eleven, when he left to catch his train. Dorian asks to be wakened at nine in the morning, and Francis shuffles back to bed.

Dorian reflects on the situation in the library. The chapter ends as Dorian takes down a directory and locates a name and address: Alan Campbell, 152, Hertford Street, Mayfair.

Commentary

Ever the playwright, Wilde divides this climactic action into two chapters in order to create a dramatic pause before the men ascend the staircase to view the portrait. Chapter 12 serves only to bring the two characters together and set up the critical events in Chapter 13.

The three key events in Chapter 13 build to a dramatic climax just as they might on the stage. The first event is the shocking unveiling of the portrait. Unlike Lord Henry—and now—Dorian, Basil is a relatively unassuming, decent man. He has come to see Dorian because he is genuinely concerned about his young friend who has built quite a chilling reputation for himself in the past eighteen years. Basil wants to be told that the rumors about Dorian are wrong; his motivations for confronting Dorian are entirely selfless and honest. When he sees the painting, the sin it reveals leaves Basil shaken.

The second key event in Chapter 13—Basil's asking Dorian to absolve his sins—is an essential ingredient in the Faust theme. Realizing what has taken place with the portrait and Dorian's life, and feeling some guilt for his own involvement, Basil pleads with Dorian to let go of his pride and pray for absolution. His concern for Dorian's corrupted soul can be seen as the only truly good and pure act in the novel, and it provides a striking and tragic contrast to Dorian's response: "It is too late, Basil," and "Those words mean nothing to me now."

Typically, the central figure in the Faust legend indulges in despair, feeling that his sin is so great that he no longer can be saved. He cannot be saved because the combination of pride and despair keep him from seeking forgiveness. Dorian's problem is essentially this, his unwillingness to ask for forgiveness. In addition, there is the question of whether Dorian even wants to change his life. He states that he does not know whether he regrets the wish that evidently made the contract.

At this point, the third important event of the chapter occurs. Dorian seems to receive some sort of message from the image on the canvas and is driven to murder his old friend. Basil's death conveniently removes the most immediate and serious threat to Dorian's way of life and his pact with the forces of evil. After the murder, he feels oddly calm and goes about the business of removing evidence and establishing an alibi.

In the coolness of Dorian's actions after he kills Basil, the reader sees that Dorian has spoken at least a *few* truthful words during his corrupt life—his admission that it is too late to save his soul. Dorian kills the only real friend he has, and with that, he kills the only chance he has to redeem his soul.

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- **ulster** a long, loose overcoat made of heavy, strong fabric; originally made in Ulster, Ireland.
 - **Gladstone bag** light hand luggage consisting of two hinged compartments.
 - **Anglomanie** a combination of New Latin and French, the term indicates a mania for things English.
 - **hock** a white Rhine wine; wine from Hochheim in Germany.
 - **profligate** a person given over to excessive devotion to pleasure.
 - **curate** a clergyman in charge of a parish or one who assists a rector.
 - **cassone** Italian, "large cabinet."
 - **wainscoting** paneling; finishing the lower part of an interior wall with materials different from the upper part.
 - **parody** a mocking imitation of a literary or an artistic work.
 - **Moorish** regarding the Moslems of mixed Berber and Arab descent living mostly in northern Africa.

CHAPTER 14

Summary

The next morning, Dorian wakes from a long and untroubled sleep, but the events of the previous night begin to bother him. Basil is still in the attic room, sitting dead in the sunlight. Dorian feels that he must take action reasonably soon.

At breakfast, he looks at the morning mail. He writes two letters, sticking one in his pocket and directing Francis, his newly hired servant, to deliver the other to Mr. Campbell.

As he waits to hear from Mr. Campbell, Dorian seeks distraction. He sketches, but every drawing he does reminds him of Basil. Finally, he pulls a book at random from the shelf. It is Théophile Gautier's *Emaux et Camées*, a book of poems that inspired other French Aesthetes, including Charles Baudelaire. Especially touched by a poem about Venice, he is momentarily transported from the horrible situation he finds himself in.

As he thinks about Venice, he suddenly recalls that Basil was with him during his last visit there; although he tries to read other poems, his attempts to distract himself fail and he is drawn back to the reality of the murder. He grows increasingly more nervous and wonders what he will do if he cannot find Alan Campbell. Campbell is a passionate scientist, very knowledgeable, and has his own laboratory. The man had been a close friend of Dorian's five years before, but their friendship ended abruptly.

Time passes so slowly that it seems to stop. In a typically self-centered moment, Dorian imagines a "hideous future" for himself. Finally, the servant announces Campbell's arrival.

Campbell clearly feels bitterly hostile toward Dorian. He is there only because Dorian's letter mentioned a "matter of life and death."

Dorian confirms the graveness of the situation and confides that there is a corpse in the attic room, dead now ten hours. Campbell interrupts, saying that he does not want to hear more about the matter.

Dorian first claims that the body is that of a suicide but finally admits to having committed murder. He blames the victim for shaping his life, although perhaps unwittingly. He pleads with

Campbell to help, reasoning that because Campbell often works with corpses, he will know how to destroy a body. The job will be no worse than many that Campbell has performed on corpses at the morgue.

When Campbell still refuses to help, Dorian writes a few words on a piece of paper and gives the secret message to Campbell. As the scientist reads the brief note, he turns white and falls back in his chair. Dorian expresses pity for Campbell's situation but announces that he has already written a letter regarding the secret. He threatens to send the letter unless Campbell cooperates. Campbell makes one last, lame effort to avoid helping Dorian. He says that he cannot do the job. When Dorian reminds him that he has no choice, Campbell finally gives in; he writes a list of the required equipment, and Francis is dispatched to Campbell's laboratory to pick up the supplies.

Upstairs, Dorian discovers that he forgot to cover the portrait when he left the room the previous night. There is a "loathsome red dew . . . wet and glistening" on one of the hands in the picture. Momentarily, the portrait seems more real and horrible to Dorian than Basil's corpse. Dorian hastily covers the portrait, and Campbell brings in his equipment.

The job takes the full five hours that Campbell has predicted. Dorian is waiting downstairs in the library when Campbell enters, pale but calm, well after seven that evening. The scientist curtly states that he has done what he was asked to do and hopes never to see Dorian again. He then leaves.

When Dorian enters the attic room, he detects a horrible smell. However, there is no sign of Basil Howard.

Commentary

Throughout the novel, Wilde only hints at the nature of Dorian's secret life, leaving the reader to wonder what sins Dorian commits. Wilde surely could have been more specific about Dorian's secretive passions, but he deliberately keeps the issue vague so that readers must define sin for themselves. In this way, Wilde draws readers closer to the story.

In a similar way, Wilde doesn't say what secret Dorian holds over Campbell. Most likely, it is something that the scientist did

years ago while under Dorian's influence. In any case, Dorian is fully aware that blackmailing Campbell into helping him is dreadful, but he doesn't hesitate for a moment to do so. In fact, he scolds Campbell for not wanting to help him at first, and he even seems to take pleasure in forcing Campbell to comply eventually. Dorian has become dominated by the evil of his secrets, and he in turn seeks to dominate and control those around him. At this point in the story, Dorian shows that he has surpassed his mentor—Lord Henry—in his power to manipulate.

The interlude concerning Gautier's poetry works within the context of this novel. The poem is translated:

On a colorful scale,
Her breast dripping with pearls,
The Venus of the Adriatic
Draws her pink and white body out of the water.

The domes, on the azure of the waves
Following the pure contour of the phrase,
Swell like rounded breasts
Lifted by a sigh of love.

The skiff lands and drops me off,
Casting its rope to the pillar,
In front of a pink façade
On the marble of a staircase.

The beautiful poem about Venice contrasts with the horror of Dorian's situation and briefly carries him away to a happier, more beautiful time and place. The recollection that Basil had been with him, however, startles Dorian back to reality. The idle pleasures that Dorian uses to amuse himself can't erase, or even distract him from, the evil that he has committed. Strangely, the passions that drove him to the mad act of murder no longer hold any pleasure for him.

Note that Dorian defends Lord Henry but is quite willing to blame Basil for the loss of his soul. While Basil created the portrait, he was never part of the pact and never tried to manipulate Dorian toward a life of self-serving debauchery and vanity. Dorian, of

course, is not about to put the responsibility where it belongs—on himself. In fact, by the end of the chapter, Dorian has emotionally and psychologically divorced himself from Basil entirely, referring to him as “the thing that had been sitting at the table.” It appears that Dorian has begun to lose touch with even his self-centered version of reality.

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- **drugged with poppies** a reference to opium, which is prepared from dried juice of unripe pods of the opium poppy.
 - **gilt** covered with gold or something resembling gold.
 - **trellis** a support frame.
 - *du supplice encore mal lavée* French, “not (yet) cleansed from torment.”
 - *doigts de faune* French, “fingers of the faun.”
 - **faun** in Roman mythology, a royal deity having the body of a man but the horns, ears, tail, and sometimes the legs of a goat.
 - **Lido** an island off Venice.
 - **Tintoret** Tintoretto; original name, Jacopo Robusti (1518–94), Italian painter.
 - **Smyrna** the former name of Izmir, a port city of Turkey on the Gulf of Izmir.
 - **Hadjis** Moslems who have made the pilgrimage to Mecca.
 - **obelisk** a very tall, four-sided stone shaft that rises to a pyramidal point.
 - **Nile** the longest river in Africa, running from Lake Victoria to the Mediterranean.
 - **sphinx** a figure with the body of a lion and the head of a man, ram, or hawk.
 - *monstre charmant* French, “charming monster.”
 - **Rubinstein** Anton Rubinstein (1829–94), Russian concert pianist, composer, and educator.
 - **ague** chills, or shivering.
 - **nitric acid** a fuming, corrosive liquid.

CHAPTER 15

Summary & Commentary

After the intensity of the previous three chapters, Wilde interjects this chapter as a dramatic pause. Like a light interlude in a play following profound action, Chapter 15 is more style than substance.

The opening scene of the chapter is a dinner party at Lady Narborough's. Dorian arrives only an hour or so after Campbell's departure from his home. At first, Dorian is bored with the party. It includes a flirtatious but elderly hostess and several guests whose only distinction is their mediocrity. Dorian is relieved when Lord Henry arrives.

At dinner, Dorian eats nothing but drinks several glasses of champagne; in fact, his thirst increases as he drinks, perhaps an allusion to his unquenchable passions. Lord Henry asks if his old protégé is feeling out of sorts; Lady Narborough concludes that Dorian must be in love. Dorian manages to mutter that he has not been in love for a whole week.

Despite the clever table talk, Dorian is distracted and irritable. For example, when Lord Henry questions him about his whereabouts the previous evening, Dorian becomes agitated and gives an excessively defensive and lengthy response. Lord Henry notes that there must be something wrong with Dorian, but he is characteristically unconcerned. Dorian continues to feel out of sorts, and he leaves the party early, asking Lord Henry to make excuses to the hostess for him. Again, readers should note that Dorian is so preoccupied with his secret life that he can't enjoy the pleasures for which he has given up his soul. Now Dorian has the weight of two secrets to bear—the portrait and Basil's death.

At home, Dorian burns Basil's hat and bag, the last of the evidence that Basil was ever there. He tries to relax, but a Florentine cabinet between two windows catches his attention. He stares at the cabinet, lights a cigarette, and then throws it away. Finally, he walks to the cabinet and removes a small Chinese box. In the box is a "green paste, waxy in lustre, the odour curiously heavy and persistent." The reader can assume that the paste is an opiate of

some kind. Dorian dresses as a commoner, hails a cab, and takes off toward the river.

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- **Parma violet** a variety cultivated for its fragrance; after Parma, a city in northern Italy.
 - **Homburg** a town near Wiesbaden in Germany.
 - **ormolu** an alloy of copper and either tin or zinc, resembling gold.
 - **chaud-froid** French, meaning "hot-cold"; a molded, jellied cold meat or fish dish with a jellied sauce.
 - **décolletée** French, meaning "in a low-cut dress."
 - **édition de luxe** French, meaning "luxury edition."
 - **trop de zèle** French, meaning "too much zeal."
 - **trop d'audace** French, meaning "too much audacity."
 - **fin de siècle** French, meaning "end of the century"; a phrase especially applied to the 1890s.
 - **fin du globe** French, meaning "end of the world."
 - **peerage** a book listing noblemen and their families; peers as a class; rank or title of nobility.
 - **pastille** French, meaning "drop"; a tablet containing aromatic substances.
 - **sovereign** a gold coin formerly used in Great Britain, worth one pound.

CHAPTER 16

Summary

As Dorian rides toward his destination, he recalls Lord Henry's saying, the first day they met, "To cure the soul by means of the senses, and the senses by means of the soul." Dorian intends to do just that. He is heading for an opium den, where old sins are forgotten and new ones found. Dorian craves opium. He feels afraid, and he is certain that there is no way to atone for his sins. The best he can hope for is to forget. In just three days, he thinks, he can find freedom by losing himself in the drug.

The carriage arrives at the intended destination, and Dorian enters the shabby inn. At the end of the hall inside, he pulls aside a tattered curtain and enters a long, dark, low room. Dorian climbs a small staircase at the end of the room, leading to an even darker room.

In the upper chamber, Dorian finds Adrian Singleton, one of the young men whom Basil accused Dorian of corrupting. However, Dorian decides not to stay. Adrian's presence bothers him; he prefers to be where no one knows him. At times, Dorian thinks he sees Basil's eyes following him.

Dorian calls Adrian to the bar for a farewell shot of brandy. A woman approaches Dorian, but he gives her some money and tells her to leave. She is not so easily dissuaded. As Dorian is leaving, she shouts after him: "Prince Charming is what you like to be called, ain't it?" Her shouting startles a drowsy sailor who looks around rabidly and hurries out in pursuit of Dorian.

Dorian hurries toward a different opium den. As he takes a short cut through a den archway, someone suddenly grabs him from behind and shoves him against a wall, his hand choking Dorian, who hears the click of a revolver.

The man who chokes Dorian is James Vane, brother of Sibyl Vane, the actress who killed herself eighteen years before. He has sought Dorian, not even knowing the real name of "Prince Charming" all this time. Having heard his sister's pet name for the "gentleman" who did her wrong, James feels certain that he finally has found the cad. Dorian denies ever knowing the girl and asks how long ago this all took place. When James replies that it was eighteen years, Dorian laughs triumphantly and implores James merely to look at him under a nearby street lamp. James sees the face of a twenty-year-old lad. Clearly, he has erred. He apologizes and releases Dorian, who disappears into the night.

As James stands trembling at his mistake, the woman from the bar appears and asks why James did not kill Dorian. The woman bitterly tells him that it has been eighteen years since "Prince Charming" made *her* what she is. She swears this before God and adds, "They say he sold himself to the devil for a pretty face." She asks James for money for her room that night, but he is interested only in pursuing Dorian. Dorian, however, is gone.

Commentary

In some of the finest descriptive writing in the novel, Wilde finally allows the reader to see Dorian's secret world. The opening paragraphs of the chapter set the scene for taking the reader into the hell that is Dorian's chosen life.

The opium den is a city of lost souls, a city that Dorian easily moves within. Appropriately, Dorian muses on his own salvation as he rides toward the den. True to the Faust legend, he is certain that he has no hope for atonement. He believes that forgiveness is not possible. The best he can hope for is the numb of opium.

Most important in this chapter is that the reader sees Dorian suffering from a physical as well as a mental addiction. His hands tremble as he rides to the opium den, and the reader can only surmise that he is heading to the den to satisfy both a physical and a mental need. Although Dorian may not age, he has not escaped the personal prison created by his own desires. Even in the opium den, he can't escape the paranoid feeling that Basil's eyes are watching him. Dorian's physical and mental addiction to opium is significant because it is the first sign the reader sees that although Dorian cannot be destroyed by nature, he can destroy himself.

Wilde's descriptive style in this chapter is Gothic in its grotesque, macabre, and fantastic imagery and chilling detail. He fashions a mood of desolation and despair. His similes, which appear seldom in other chapters, are very effective in relating the grimness of the world Dorian now occupies. He creates revealing similarities with the use of "like" and "as"—for example, the "moon hung low in the sky like a yellow skull," and the streets are "like the black web of some sprawling spider." Note that the moon resembles a "yellow skull," an allusion to death that so pervades the novel in these late chapters.

In no small way, the dangers of excess even threaten Dorian's Aestheticism. Instead of admiring beauty, he craves ugliness. He once detested ugliness because it made things too real, but now he pursues it as his 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 factuality of impression, than all the gracious shapes of art, the dreamy shadows of song." Wilde reveals the dangers of Aestheticism gone so wrong that it is

the opposite of itself. At the same time, Wilde is not teaching or preaching. As he says in the preface to the novel, there is no such thing as a "moral" or "immoral" book. Books are simply written well or badly. In this chapter, Wilde writes very, very well.

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- **quay** a wharf where ships are loaded and unloaded.
 - **merchantman** a commercial ship.
 - **coaling** filling up with coal.
 - **mackintosh** a waterproof raincoat.
 - **Malays** native people of Malaysia, Indonesia, and surrounding areas.
 - **marionettes** puppets manipulated by strings.

CHAPTERS 17 & 18

Summary

One week has passed, and Dorian has retreated to his country estate, Selby Royal. His guests include the beautiful Duchess of Monmouth (Gladys); her older, boring, somewhat jaded husband; Lady Narborough, old and flirtatious but seldom boring; and Lord Henry.

The conversation is light and superficial. Lord Henry wants to re-christen (rename) some things—especially, flowers. Beautiful objects should have beautiful names, he says. The duchess asks what new name Lord Henry shall have, and Dorian immediately answers appropriately, "Prince Paradox." The duchess tries to flirt with Dorian, and he excuses himself to fetch her some of his orchids. Lord Henry lightheartedly warns the duchess about loving Dorian.

Suddenly the group hears a muted groan and the sound of a heavy fall. Lord Henry rushes to find that Dorian has fainted. When Dorian comes to, he refuses to be alone. Despite his condition, he joins the others at dinner and tries to act jolly. Now and then, however, terror shoots through him as he recalls the cause of his faint: the face of James Vane observing him through a window.

Dorian spends most of the next day in his room. Feeling hunted, stalked, and sick with fear of death, he alternates between

the certainty of punishment and an equal certainty that the wicked receive no such fate in this world. He concludes that the only morality is the success of the strong and the failure of the weak.

On the third day, Dorian finally goes out. He has decided that he imagined James' face in the window. After breakfast, he strolls in the garden with the duchess for an hour. Then he joins her brother, Sir Geoffrey Clouston, and others who are shooting birds. A hare bursts forth, and Sir Geoffrey aims, but Dorian so admires the beauty and grace of the animal that he cries, "Let it live." Lord Geoffrey finds Dorian's plea silly and fires as the hare jumps into a thicket. Two sounds come from the brush: the cry of a hare and the cry of a man.

Incredibly, a dead human body is pulled from the brush. Lord Henry recommends calling off the hunt for the day. Dorian would like to cancel the "hideous and cruel" hunt for good; he fears that the death is a bad omen.

Lord Henry laughs at Dorian's concern, saying that the only thing horrible in life is boredom. There are no omens, he says.

In his room, Dorian lies in terror on the sofa. Later, he calls his servant and tells him to pack. Dorian will leave at eight-thirty to catch the night express to London. He writes a note to Lord Henry, asking him to take care of the guests because he is going to London to see his doctor.

Thornton, Dorian's chief gamekeeper, enters with startling news. The dead man cannot be identified. He was not one of the beaters, after all. In fact, he seems to be a sailor, armed with a gun.

Dorian rushes to where the body lies. Identifying the body as James Vane's, Dorian feels safe at last.

Commentary

Wilde makes excellent use of contrast in the setting of these chapters. Life at Selby Royal could not be more different from the secret world of Dorian Gray. Wilde writes about bright conversations, bright lights, and bright days. Such idyllic life adds to Dorian's discomfort when terror twice invades his country estate. Early on, he is seeking orchids but finds the face of James Vane. Just as he is recovering from the shock, a man is ominously killed by accident. Dorian decides to flee because, he realizes, "Death walked

there in the sunlight." He expects evil in the opium den, not in the fresh air of Selby Royal. Dorian's tragic fate haunts him wherever he goes. Before, Dorian felt that his situation was hopeless; now, he is beginning to learn what hopelessness really feels like.

Wilde exposes the egocentricity of class distinction through the death of what seems to be a lowly beater. First, Sir Geoffrey is annoyed that the "ass" got out in front of the guns. It ruins his shooting for the whole day. Then Lord Henry comments, "It is rather awkward for Geoffrey, of course. It does not do to pepper beaters. It makes people think that one is a wild shot." Incredibly, Lord Henry is more concerned with his shooting partner's reputation than with a man's death.

Even Dorian seems to have little more compassion for the man than he has for the hare. He dislikes shooting and killing, but his chief concern, as usual, is himself. He sees the death as a bad omen, a threat to himself. When Thornton comes to Dorian's room, the master immediately pulls his chequebook out of a drawer. It may be kind of him to want to pay the family of the dead man, but Dorian would not think of visiting them or the corpse until he suspects that it might be James Vane.

Dorian's ultimate relief is ironic. Even as he feels joy at seeing James Vane dead, he is far from safe.

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- **Tartuffe** a hypocrite; the word comes from Molière's *Le Tartuffe*, a play in which the lead character—Tartuffe—almost destroys a family that has taken him in.
 - **riposte** French, "retort" or reply in a direct manner.
 - **Parthian** pertaining to a shot fired by one in actual or feigned retreat; after the tactics of the archers from Parthia in Western Asia.
 - **beater** someone who is hired to flush wild game from cover for hunters; on some hunts, they beat percussion instruments.
 - **censure** an expression of blame or disapproval.
 - **lithe** supple; easily bent; flexible.
 - **presentiment** premonition; a sense that something is about to occur.
 - **Artemis** in Greek mythology, the goddess of the hunt.

CHAPTERS 19 & 20

Summary

Approximately six months have passed. As Chapter 19 opens, Dorian and Lord Henry apparently have just dined at the older man's home. Despite recently having gone through a divorce, Lord Henry is his usual witty self. Dorian seems more pensive, even grave. They are discussing Dorian's vow to change his behavior.

Lord Henry says that Dorian is perfectly fine as he is. Dorian, however, says that he has done "too many dreadful things" in his life. He wants to reform. In fact, he began the previous day. He was staying alone at a small inn in the country and was seeing a young girl named Hetty Merton. She reminded him of Sibyl Vane in her beauty and innocence. A simple village girl, Dorian is fairly sure that he loved her. They were to run off together that morning at dawn, but he spared the child by leaving her "as flowerlike as I had found her."

Lord Henry brings up the disappearance of Basil; he also mentions his own divorce and Alan Campbell's suicide. Lord Henry allows that only death and vulgarity cannot be explained. He asks Dorian to play the piano. Dorian plays for a while but stops and asks Lord Henry if he ever thought that Basil might have been murdered. Lord Henry dismisses the idea with a quip. When Dorian asks what Lord Henry would say if Dorian claimed to be the murderer, Lord Henry states that the crime does not suit Dorian; it is too vulgar. Lord Henry then asks about Basil's portrait of Dorian. Dorian confirms that it was lost or stolen, but he never cared much for it anyway.

Lord Henry tells of walking through the park the previous Sunday and observing a group of people listening to a preacher who asked, "What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" (See Mark 8:36 in the New Testament for the precise language.) Lord Henry found this "uncouth Christian" to be "curious" and "hysterical." Dorian, however, is not amused.

Lord Henry has no interest in a serious discussion and indirectly asks Dorian to reveal the secret of his youth. To retrieve his youth, says the older man, "I would do anything in the world, except take exercise, get up early, or be respectable." He wishes he

could change places with Dorian, and he is pleased that the younger man has never actually "done anything." Dorian's life has been his art.

For once, Dorian is in no mood for flattery and says he wishes to retire early. The subject of the "yellow book" occurs to Dorian, and he asks Lord Henry never to lend the destructive volume to anyone else. They agree to meet the next morning.

Back home, Dorian wonders if he will ever really change. He reflects on Basil's death and Alan Campbell's suicide, but what really bothers him is the death of his own soul. He rationalizes that Basil painted the damaging portrait and said "unbearable" things to Dorian. Alan Campbell's suicide was the man's own doing, not Dorian's. They are nothing to him.

His own life is his only concern. Wondering if the portrait has changed since his virtuous behavior toward Hetty Merton, he creeps upstairs to see.

In the attic room, Dorian lifts the cloth off the portrait. If anything, the picture looks even more evil. Around the eyes there is "a look of cunning and in the mouth the curved wrinkle of the hypocrite." Blood has spread over the fingers, onto the feet, even to the other hand. Dorian shudders. He wonders if he should confess Basil's murder but dismisses the idea.

The portrait itself is the only evidence against him. He no longer enjoys its record of his debauchery. He worries that it will be discovered and decides to destroy it. The knife he used to murder Basil is still in the room. Using it to "kill the past," he grabs the knife and stabs the portrait.

The servants are awakened by a horrible scream and a crash. Two passersby outside are so alarmed that they summon a policeman. No one inside Dorian's house responds when the officer rings at the door.

After fifteen minutes or so, Francis ascends the staircase with two other servants. No one answers their knock on the attic door, and they cannot force it open. They climb to the roof, drop to the balcony, open a window, and go into the attic. There, they find an old and ugly man lying in front of their master's portrait. In the portrait, Dorian appears as beautiful and young as he had the day before.

Commentary

In the Faust legend, the main character ultimately confronts the loss of his soul but is incapable of seeking redemption through confession and absolution. He despairs and feels that he is beneath pardon or that there is no God or power strong enough to save him. In this sense, the Faust protagonist still suffers the sin of pride in that he sees his own case as so special that it is beyond God's help. Despair is the one unpardonable sin because the sinner is incapable of asking to be pardoned. Traditionally, despair is symbolized by suicide.

In the closing chapters of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian's behavior and attitude are consistent with this Faust tradition. Dorian has matured from the naïve, vain youth in Basil's studio. He has grown into a man who was at first despicable but in the end is almost likable. Perhaps he is more pitiable than likable. However, he cannot find salvation because he is incapable of setting aside his pride, confessing, and asking for absolution.

In Chapter 19, as the after-dinner scene opens at Lord Henry's, Dorian is bursting with pride because of a recent act of decency. He has returned Hetty Merton to her country life after winning her devotion. Unfortunately, instead of seeing this act as only one small step, Dorian expects instant reward. When he checks the portrait for some sign of his newfound virtue, he finds only a look of cunning about the eyes and a wrinkle of hypocrisy in the mouth. There seems to be fresh blood on the hands. Instead of redeeming his soul, his act of supposed redemption has tarnished his soul even more because the act was motivated by selfishness.

Dorian cannot redeem his soul because he is still primarily interested in himself. He dismisses the deaths of Basil and Alan Campbell. The first, he decides, was inevitable; the second made his own choice. In neither case does Dorian accept his own responsibility. Still, he is torn because he realizes that the "soul is a terrible reality." He thinks that a person should pray for punishment, but he fails to understand that the only way of absolving immoral responsibility is to pray for forgiveness.

In the novel's powerful final paragraphs, Dorian, in effect, commits suicide. He despises the figure in the portrait, but that is who he has become. When he slashes at the painting with the

knife, appropriately the same knife that killed Basil, Dorian kills himself. The horrible cry, which awakens the servants and startles the men on the street, carries with it the agony of eighteen years of horror.

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- **idyll** a scene or event of rural simplicity.
 - **Perdita and Florizel** lovers in William Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*.
 - **Ophelia** a leading character in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; she dies by drowning, although Shakespeare leaves unclear if her drowning is a suicide or an accident.
 - **Scotland Yard** headquarters of the London Metropolitan Police, housed at New Scotland Yard on the Thames embankment.
 - **Burgundy** a wine, usually red, produced in the Burgundy ("Bourgogne") region of southeastern France.
 - **vinaigrette** French, from Old French *vinaigre*, "vinegar"; a small, often decorated container used for aromatic restoratives, such as smelling salts or vinegar solutions.
 - **Chopin** Frédéric François Chopin (1810–49), Polish pianist and composer of works for piano and orchestra; resident of France from 1829 until his death.
 - **Velasquez** Diego Rodriquez de Silva y Velásquez (1599–1660), Spanish painter.
 - **Seine** the river that runs through Paris.
 - **Like the painting of a sorrow, / A face without a heart** from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Act IV, Scene 7, 108–09.
 - **Jav** an island of Indonesia.
 - **scurf** scaly or shredded dry skin.
 - **nocturne** a musical composition intended to evoke thoughts or feelings of night.
 - **Majorca** largest of Spain's Balearic Islands, in the Mediterranean Sea, about 120 miles southeast of Barcelona.
 - **Apollo** in Greek mythology, the god of the sun, music, and poetry; a young man of great physical beauty.

- **Marsyas** in Greek mythology, he lost a music contest and his life to Apollo.
- **palate** the roof of the mouth.
- ***lilas blanc*** French, meaning "white lilac."
- **iniquities** sins.
- **idolatrous** excessively adoring.
- **visage** facial expression; appearance.

CRITICAL ESSAYS

OSCAR WILDE'S AESTHETICS

The philosophical foundations of Aestheticism were formulated in the eighteenth century by Immanuel Kant, who spoke for the autonomy of art. Art was to exist for its own sake, for its own essence or beauty. The artist was not to be concerned about morality or utility or even the pleasure that a work might bring to its audience. Aestheticism was supported in Germany by J. W. von Goethe and in England by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Thomas Carlyle.

Benjamin Constant first used the phrase *l'art pour l'art* (French, meaning "art for art," or "art for art's sake") in 1804; Victor Cousin popularized the words that became a catch-phrase for Aestheticism in the 1890s. French writers such as Théophile Gautier and Charles-Pierre Baudelaire contributed significantly to the movement.

Oscar Wilde did not invent Aestheticism, but he was a dramatic leader in promoting the movement near the end of the nineteenth century. Wilde was especially influenced as a college student by the works of the English poet and critic Algernon Charles Swinburne and the American writer Edgar Allan Poe. The English essayist Walter Pater, an advocate of "art for art's sake," helped to form Wilde's humanistic aesthetics in which he was more concerned with the individual, the self, than with popular movements like Industrialism or Capitalism. Art was not meant to instruct and should not concern itself with social, moral, or political guidance.

Like Baudelaire, Wilde advocated freedom from moral restraint and the limitations of society. This point of view contradicted Victorian convention in which the arts were supposed to be spiritually uplifting and instructive. Wilde went a step further and stated that the artist's life was even more important than any work that he produced; his life was to be his most important body of work.

The most important of Wilde's critical works, published in May 1891, is a volume titled *Intentions*. It consists of four essays: "The Decay of Lying," "Pen, Pencil and Poison," "The Critic as Artist," and "The Truth of Masks." These and the contemporary essay "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" affirm Wilde's support of Aestheticism and supply the philosophical context for his novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

"**The Decay of Lying**" was first published in January 1889. Wilde called it a "trumpet against the gate of dullness" in a letter to Kate Terry Lewis. The dialogue, which Wilde felt was his best, takes place in the library of a country house in Nottinghamshire. The participants are Cyril and Vivian, which were the names of Wilde's sons (the latter spelled "Vyvyan"). Almost immediately, Vivian advocates one of the tenets of Wilde's Aestheticism: Art is superior to Nature. Nature has good intentions but can't carry them out. Nature is crude, monotonous, and lacking in design when compared to Art.

According to Vivian, man needs the temperament of the true liar" with his frank, fearless statements, his superb irresponsibility, his healthy, natural disdain of proof of any kind!" Artists with this attitude will not be shackled by sterile facts but will be able to tell beautiful truths that have nothing to do with fact.

"**Pen, Pencil and Poison**" was first published in January 1889. It is a biographical essay on the notorious writer, murderer, and forger Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, who used the pen name "Janus Weathercock."

Wilde's approach is that Wainewright's criminal activities reveal the soul of a true artist. The artist must have a "concentration of vision and intensity of purpose" that exclude moral or ethical judgment. True aesthetes belong to the "elect," as Wilde calls them

in "The Decay of Lying," and are beyond such concerns. As creative acts, there is no significant difference between art and murder. The artist often will conceal his identity behind a mask, but Wilde maintains that the mask is more revealing than the actual face. Disguises intensify the artist's personality. Life itself is an art, and the true artist presents his life as his finest work. Wilde, who attempted to make this distinction in his own life through his attempts to re-create himself, includes this theme in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

The longest of the essays in *Intentions*, "**The Critic as Artist**," first appeared in two parts (July and September 1890) with the significant title, "The True Function and Value in Criticism; With Some Remarks on the Importance of Doing Nothing: A Dialogue." It is considered to be a response to Matthew Arnold's essay "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" (1865). Arnold's position is that the creative faculty is higher than the critical. The central thesis of Wilde's essay is that the critic must reach beyond the creative work that he considers.

The setting of the dialogue is a library in a house in London's Piccadilly area overlooking Green Park, and the principal characters are Gilbert and Ernest.

Along with the central theme of the importance of the critic, Gilbert espouses the significance of the individual. The man makes the times; the times do not make the man. Further, he advocates that "Sin is an essential element of progress." Sin helps assert individuality and avoid the monotony of conformity. Rules of morality are non-creative and, thus, evil.

The best criticism must cast off ordinary guidelines, especially those of Realism, and accept the aesthetics of Impressionism—what a reader *feels* when reading a work of literature rather than what a reader *thinks*, or reasons, while reading. The critic must transcend literal events and consider the "imaginative passions of the mind." The critic should not seek to explain a work of art but should seek to deepen its mystery.

"**The Truth of Masks**" first appeared in May 1885 under the title "Shakespeare and Stage Costume." The essay originally was a response to an article written by Lord Lytton in December 1884, in which Lytton argues that Shakespeare had little interest in the costumes that his characters wear. Wilde takes the opposite position.

More important within the context of *Intentions*, Wilde himself always put great emphasis on appearance and the masks, or costumes, with which the artist or individual confronts the world.

Wilde also raises the question of self-contradiction. In art, he says, there is no such thing as an absolute truth: "A Truth is that whose contradictory is also true." This sentiment recalls Wilde's tremendous respect for the thoughts of Walt Whitman. In "Song of Myself," Whitman writes, "Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself, / (I am large, I contain multitudes)."

"The Soul of Man Under Socialism" first appeared in February 1891. In it, Wilde expresses his Aesthetics primarily through the emphasis that the essay places on the individual. In an unusual interpretation of socialism, Wilde believed that the individual would be allowed to flourish under the system. He thus warns against tyrannical rulers and concludes that the best form of government for the artist is no government at all.

In this essay, it's easy to see that Wilde loved to shock. If Walt Whitman wanted to wake the world with his "barbaric yawp," Wilde preferred aphorisms, paradox, irony, and satire. While Wilde wouldn't want to be accused of sincerity, he was certainly devoted to Aestheticism in his life as well as his art.

ON TOUR: LECTURES IN AMERICA, 1882

Oscar Wilde was just ten weeks past his twenty-seventh birthday when he boarded the *S. S. Arizona* on December 24, 1881, destined for America and a year of lecturing as an expert on art and literature.

Wilde saw himself as a representative of the Aesthetic Movement and hoped to encourage an appreciation for beauty in an America that was largely devoted to industrialization. The tour was promoted to exploit Wilde's reputation as an aesthete. The *Arizona* arrived in New York on January 2, 1882. Local newspaper reporters were so eager to get a quote from Wilde that several of them hired a launch boat to bring them aboard Wilde's ship before it docked. In an interview the next day, Wilde welcomed his role as defender of the arts: "I am here to diffuse beauty, and I have no objection to saying that."

The timing of the tour had everything to do with the recent success of a Gilbert and Sullivan play *Patience; or Bunthorne's Bride*, which had opened to enthusiastic reviews at the Standard Theatre in New York in September 1881. *Patience* satirized the Aesthetic Movement and presented a character named Bunthorne who personified the popular stereotypes of the aesthete. The caricature featured long hair, knee breeches, silk stockings, and effete mannerisms. Bunthorne was fond of gazing at lilies and sunflowers. The play recalled one of many legends that Wilde delighted in cultivating. Supposedly he had walked down Piccadilly dressed in such a costume and carrying a flower. Wilde's son Vyvyan later quoted his father's comment on the story: "Anyone could have done that; the difficult thing to achieve was to make people believe that I had done it." As usual, perception was more important than reality for Wilde.

Despite an impressive resonant voice, Wilde made no claim of being a great orator; however, he tried to give the audiences what they expected in appearance as well as a certain degree of enlightenment. He noted on one occasion that the audience was disappointed that he had worn ordinary clothing rather than his knee breeches. On January 31, Wilde was to speak at the Music Hall in Boston. Sixty Harvard students decided to parody Wilde's clothes and manners. When the auditorium was nearly full, the students, each dressed like Bunthorne, paraded in pairs down the center aisle to their seats in the front rows, swishing sunflowers and lilies as they went. Wilde, who had been tipped off, appeared in conventional evening dress. After welcoming the students and the rest of the audience, he drolly commented, "Caricature is the tribute that mediocrity pays to genius." This won loud applause from the entire audience. He then sighed a quiet prayer, "Save me from my disciples," which again evoked enthusiastic applause.

Wilde's appearances were not always so well received. Lecturing on literature or "The English Renaissance" or "The House Beautiful" or "The Decorative Arts," he sometimes spoke to small crowds or received mediocre reviews. At other times, he was a huge success, so much so that his tour, originally scheduled for three months, was extended to ten months. He spoke in more than a hundred cities and towns throughout the Northeast, Midwest, South, and West, and in several cities in Canada. He appeared in

Philadelphia, Boston, and San Francisco but also in Atchison, Kansas; Brantford, Ontario; Macon, Georgia; and Galveston, Texas.

Wilde's pose as an aesthete was all the more effective because he himself was a very large man, more than six feet three inches tall. Although he seldom engaged in sports, he was quite strong and known as a good boxer. Sir Frank Benson, himself an athlete at Oxford, reported in his memoirs that only one man in the college "had a ghost of a chance in a tussle with Wilde." On one occasion, four undergraduates entered Wilde's room and broke up his furniture. Wilde caught them in the act, booted out one, doubled over a second with a punch, tossed a third in the air, and carried the fourth to the man's own room, where Wilde invited spectators to join him in sampling the would-be-ruffian's wines and spirits.

On tour, Wilde took special delight in meeting ordinary people. (Remember that many of the accounts of these meetings come from Wilde's letters to friends and relatives back home, and he was never one to allow boring facts to get in the way of a good story.) One of his favorite visits, a highlight of the trip, was to Leadville, Colorado, high in the Rocky Mountains, and to a silver mine called "Matchless." Wilde read passages from the autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini, the sixteenth-century Italian artist who was an eminent silversmith. Wilde said that the gun-toting miners were disappointed that he had not brought Cellini with him. When Wilde reported that the artist was dead, one of the miners asked, "Who shot him?"

Another visit, to the state penitentiary in Lincoln, Nebraska, produced observations made ironic by Wilde's own incarceration thirteen years later. Wilde's letter home spoke of the horrifying existence and the mean-looking men, adding in a letter to Helen Sickert, "I should hate to see a criminal with a noble face." He did ask the inmates if they read and what they read. It gave him pause when he discovered that some were devoted to Shelley and Dante. Wilde himself would later read Dante in prison.

While on tour, Wilde met with various dignitaries and writers, including Walt Whitman and Henry James. The visit with Whitman, at the poet's home in Camden, New Jersey, was precipitated by an interview in which Wilde was asked to name his favorite American poets. He mentioned Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Wilde actually preferred Edgar Allan Poe for his dark

moods and Aestheticism, but Poe was dead. Wilde was enough of a self-promoter to mention living writers.

The Philadelphia Press interviewed Whitman at length the evening of his introduction to Wilde (January 19, 1882). Whitman reported that he and Wilde had "a jolly good time" and that Wilde was genuine, honest, and without affectation. They spoke of Tennyson, Browning, and Swinburne while sharing a bottle of homemade elderberry wine. Wilde was respectful and on his best behavior. Later he would qualify his assessment of Whitman's poetry while continuing to respect him as a philosopher and a man.

Wilde's meeting with Henry James was less successful. The novelist called on Wilde at the latter's hotel in Washington, D. C., two days after Wilde's visit with Whitman. On this occasion, Wilde was less than diplomatic. When James expressed nostalgia for London, Wilde chose to be clever rather than considerate and commented, "You care for places? The world is my home." Wilde's comment seems particularly inappropriate considering that James was the more cultivated cosmopolitan. At any rate, James concluded that Wilde was "a fatuous fool" and "a tenth-rate cad."

Wilde returned to England at the end of the year having concluded a generally successful and profitable tour. He later (1883-85) conducted a sporadic series of lectures on his impressions of America to British audiences.

THREE TRIALS: OSCAR WILDE GOES TO COURT, 1895

Wilde believed in his way of life so strongly that he eventually spent several years in jail after his attempts to defend it.

At issue was Wilde's relationship with Lord Alfred ("Douglas"). Wilde was forty years old at the time of the trials; Lord Alfred was sixteen years his junior but no child, at age twenty-four, and certainly not an innocent. They first met in the early summer of 1891. Douglas was a devoted fan of Wilde's novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, claiming that he had read it either nine or fourteen times. Lord Alfred was a slight, handsome, impetuous young man who already had a very difficult relationship with his father. He had homosexual relations with several boys at Oxford and was blackmailed in the spring of 1892. He was especially irresponsible about money, often insisting that Wilde spend lavish amounts on him.

Lord Alfred's father, the Eighth Marquess of Queensberry (1844–1900), was irate about the relationship between his son and Wilde and sought to discredit Wilde. While Douglas was visiting Algeria, the father hoped to disrupt the opening performance of Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest* but was turned away. On February 18, 1895, he left a card for Wilde at the Albemarle Club, addressed "To Oscar Wilde posing Somdomite," misspelling the last word. Homosexual activity was illegal in England.

Wilde had several choices. Having been accused, publicly, in writing, he might have cause to bring a libel suit against the Marquess. The card certainly was seen by the hall porter, Sidney Wright, who knew that an insult was intended and carefully noted the details of the card's arrival, although he was not able to deliver it to Wilde for ten days. Wilde wrote to his good friend, Robert Ross, stating that he felt compelled to pursue criminal prosecution of the Marquess. Ross wisely advised Wilde to ignore the card and allow Lord Alfred and his father to settle their differences themselves. Another alternative was for Wilde to visit France for a time and hope that tempers would cool.

Wilde's biggest problem was that the accusation was true. Wilde had several such relationships with young men, including Douglas. A written statement is not libelous if it is true. However, Wilde assured his attorneys that the charge was false. There is some evidence that Wilde tried to back out of the trial at the last moment, saying that he could not afford it, but Lord Alfred was adamant in wanting to prosecute his father and promised financial support from relatives.

Queensberry's trial opened at the Central Criminal Court (Old Bailey) on April 3, 1895. The trial went badly for Wilde. He was asked several questions about *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and the relationships between older and younger men in that novel, and he was accused of relations with other young men, not just Lord Alfred. Sir Edward Clarke, his attorney, advised Wilde to withdraw, hoping privately (he revealed later) that Wilde could escape the country. Wilde had several hours during which he could have done so. Ross and others encouraged him to flee, but he stayed. A warrant was issued for Wilde's arrest since Queensberry's justification forced the authorities to recognize Wilde's implied guilt. Wilde wrote to the *Evening News* that he could not win the case

without pitting Douglas against his father in court and chose not to do so—a calculated response by Wilde.

The second trial began on April 26. Clarke again represented Wilde, this time without fee. The most dramatic part of the trial involved a poem written by Douglas and titled "Two Loves," which ends with the words, "I am the love that dare not speak its name." When asked what that might mean, Wilde responded with such eloquence that many in the gallery burst into applause, although some hissed. Wilde alluded to Michelangelo and Shakespeare, among others, as older men who had "deep, spiritual affection" for younger men in "the noblest form of affection." He argued that such relationships were much misunderstood in the nineteenth century and the reason for his being on trial. One dare not speak the name of this noble love, he concluded, because it was so misunderstood. The speech probably influenced the jury's inability to agree on a verdict.

The third trial, a second attempt to prosecute Wilde (after the hung jury of the second trial), opened on May 22. Again, friends urged Wilde to flee the country, but he wrote to Lord Alfred that he "did not want to be called a coward or a deserter." The prosecution benefited from the previous trial and won. Wilde was found guilty of indecent behavior with men, a lesser charge but one for which he received the maximum penalty under the Criminal Law Amendment Act: two years at hard labor.

Those familiar with the history of the period might note parallels between the Dreyfus Affair (1894–1906) in France and Oscar Wilde's trials in England. Alfred Dreyfus was the son of a Jewish textile manufacturer; he joined the military and rose to the rank of captain. He was accused of selling military secrets to the Germans and convicted of treason in December 1894. The trial was highly irregular, and the conviction was based on insufficient evidence. Much of the impetus for the trial came from political conservatives, anti-Semitic groups, and publications such as the newspaper *La Libre Parole*. They encouraged the public to believe that French Jews were disloyal. The novelist Émile Zola led other intellectuals and politicians in a campaign on Dreyfus' behalf. After two more trials and considerable turmoil, Dreyfus eventually was pardoned and the judgment set aside. Dreyfus had been persecuted for

religious and political reasons; Oscar Wilde was persecuted for being a homosexual.

REVIEW QUESTIONS AND ESSAY TOPICS

- (1) Why is Basil Hallward reluctant to exhibit the portrait of Dorian Gray?
- (2) How does Dorian get the idea of having the portrait age instead of him?
- (3) What happened to Dorian's mother and father?
- (4) Who is Mr. Isaacs? How does Dorian describe him?
- (5) What is Mrs. Vane's secret?
- (6) Why does Sibyl Vane perform poorly when Basil and Lord Henry see her?
- (7) How and why does Sibyl die?
- (8) Where does Dorian hide the portrait? Why?
- (9) What is the "yellow book"?
- (10) Why does Basil Hallward want to see Dorian before leaving for Paris?
- (11) What happens when Basil comments that only God can see Dorian's soul?
- (12) What favor does Alan Campbell perform for Dorian? Why does he do it?
- (13) What happens at the opium den to arouse James Vane?
- (14) How does Dorian escape from James?

- (15) What does Dorian see in the conservatory window at his country estate, and why is it important to the novel?
- (16) Sir Geoffrey has a double kill at the hunt. What does he shoot?
- (17) Briefly describe Hetty Merton and comment on her significance in the novel.
- (18) What does Dorian see in the portrait after leaving Hetty?
- (19) What does Dorian decide to do with the portrait?
- (20) What do Francis, the coachman, and the footman find in the attic?
- (21) Discuss the Faust theme as it relates to Dorian.
- (22) Consider the role of Lord Henry in the novel. Discuss both his persona as a social figure and his relationship with Dorian.
- (23) What is the nature of friendship in the book? Consider specifically Basil, Lord Henry, and Dorian as they relate to each other.
- (24) Of what importance are sin and redemption in the novel?
- (25) Discuss the theme of manipulation as it affects Dorian and those whom he influences.
- (26) What is the role of innocence in this work? Consider specifically Sibyl Vane, Hetty Merton, and Dorian.
- (27) What does the novel reveal about racial and class prejudice in Wilde's era?
- (28) Assume that you are a crime reporter for the *St. James's Gazette* and that your police informers sneak you into

Dorian's home to view the final scene. How would you report it? Whom would you interview? What do you think they say?

- (29) After the events that end the novel, what will Lord Henry have to say at the next dinner party? Invent at least one aphorism for him regarding the matter.
- (30) Is *The Picture of Dorian Gray* an immoral book? Why or why not? Write a letter to Wilde in which you attempt to convince him of your position.
- (31) What role does Aestheticism play in the novel?

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ONLINE RESOURCES

- Oscar Wilde Internet Discussion List (www.kimberwicke.8m.com/wilde)
- Oscar Wilde Resources (www.evanston.lib.il.us)
- Oscar Wilde's 1895 Martyrdom for 'Indecent Acts' (www.mcs.net/~jorn)
- Oscariana (www.jonno.com/oscariana)
- Wilde: The Story of the First Modern Man (www.oscarwilde.com)