

A HEGELIAN DIALECTIC READING OF OSCAR WILDE'S THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

Oscar Wilde'in Dorian Gray'in Portresi'nin Hegelci Diyalektik Okuması

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ABSTRACT: Oscar Wilde's only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* has been the subject of analysis from a wide variety of theoretical and thematic perspectives. This study endeavours to conduct a philosophical interpretation of the renowned Wildean work of fiction. In specific, the article aims to carry out a dialectic reading of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by concentrating on the protagonist and the path he takes throughout the narrative. To this end, the novel is discussed through the framework of GWF. Hegel's dialectic triad of the thesis, antithesis and synthesis. The theoretical section of the study focuses on the Hegelian dialectic system and scrutinises the three stages with references to various texts and sources. The second part of the study contemplates to establish a dialectic reading of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, identifying these three stages within the story and exposing the vital dialectic choices the protagonist makes along his quest to preserve youth and beauty forever. The article concludes that Dorian Gray exposes the dialectic nature of human beings and highlights the significance of making the right choices through a rational and moral state of mind. In particular, it has been concluded that Dorian experiences the thesis and the antithesis but ultimately gets caught up in the antithesis and does not manage to achieve the synthesis stage, causing his early self-destruction.

Keywords: *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Hegelian Dialectic, Thesis, Antithesis, Synthesis

ÖZ: Oscar Wilde'in tek romanı, *Dorian Gray'in Portresi* geniş çapta pek çok kuramsal ve tematik bakış açısıyla günümüze dek analiz konusu olmuştur. Bu araştırma, Wilde'in ünlü eserine felsefi bir yorum getirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Özel anlamda, makale, ana karaktere ve onun hikâye boyunca kendine çizdiği yola odaklanarak *Dorian Gray'in Portresi*'nin diyalektik okumasını gerçekleştirmeyi hedeflemektedir. Bu bağlamda roman, GWF. Hegel'in diyalektik triad olarak bilinen: tez, antitez ve sentez çerçevesinden yola çıkarak tartışılmaktadır. Araştırmanın kuramsal çerçevesi Hegel'in diyalektik sistemine odaklanmakta ve belirtilen üç aşamayı çeşitli metin ve kaynaklara yapılan referanslarla incelemektedir. Araştırmanın ikinci bölümü ise Wilde'in *Dorian Gray'in Portresi*'nin kurgusunda söz konusu üç aşamayı tanımlayarak, ana karakterin gençliğini ve güzelliğini sonsuza dek koruyabilmek

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amacıyla hikâye boyunca yapmış olduğu ve hayati önem arz eden diyalektik seçimleri açığa çıkarmaktadır. Böylece makale, Dorian Gray karakterinin insanlığın diyalektik doğasını ortaya çıkardığı ve bununla birlikte rasyonel ve ahlaki bir zihin yapısı ile doğru tercihlerin yapılmasının ne denli önemli olduğu sonucuna varmaktadır. Daha özel anlamda, Dorian Gray karakterinin tez ve antitez evresini deneyimlediği ancak nihayetinde antitez aşamasında sıkışıp kaldığı ve sentez aşamasına ulaşamayarak, kendi erken yıkımına sebebiyet verdiği sonucuna ulaşılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Dorian Gray*'in Portresi, Hegel Diyalektiği, Tez, Antitez, Sentez

Introduction

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) was an Irish poet and playwright who came to be known for his flamboyant lifestyle and intriguing understanding of aesthetics. Wilde published many plays and poems during his lifetime but his one and only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, through which he gained enormous success and widespread fame, was published in 1891 (Wilde, 2000: i). At the time of its publishing, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* met with fierce opposition and in the upcoming years, the novel was used in the first two of his three trials as proof of Wilde's "certain tendencies" which were thought to be mentioned in the novel (Wilde, 2000: ix). *The Picture of Dorian Gray* tells the story of a young man named Dorian Gray who is an extremely handsome young man. The plot centers on Dorian and the characters around him, Basil Hallward, Lord Henry Wotton, Sybil Vane (Dorian's future girlfriend) and James Vane (Sybil's brother) The central point of attention in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is the contrast between Dorian's beautiful appearance and his gradually deteriorating inner beauty. While the novel deals with many themes and issues, this binary opposition is central to most of the matters mentioned in the narrative.

This article endeavours to analyse Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* using a Hegelian dialectic approach. In a specific context, the article unveils the three stages within the narrative of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and concludes that the novel exposes the dialectic nature of human beings through the eyes of the protagonist, Dorian Gray. To that end, the theoretical part of the article focuses on Hegelian dialectics and in particular, the Hegelian triad of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. The second part of the article takes up a descriptive analysis method to perform a Hegelian dialectic reading of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and examines Wilde's narrative in three stages which reflect Dorian's dialectic process. The first stage or the thesis stage is depicted from the beginning of the novel until the moment that Dorian sees his picture, presented to him by Basil Hallward. In this stage, Dorian's naïve personality along with Basil's views concerning morality are

prevalent. The thesis stage will be referred to as the “Basillian” stage. The second stage or the antithesis comes into effect after Dorian sees his own painting and suddenly realises that he will grow old and ugly whereas the painting will remain young and beautiful until eternity. At this particular moment Dorian makes his famous pact: his soul in return for eternal youth. From this moment on, Dorian lives under the serious influence of Lord Henry Wotton. He lives a life dominated by hedonism, sin and selfishness, void of any type of moral obligations. It is eventually this hedonistic lifestyle which causes Dorian’s downfall. To this end, the antithesis stage will be mentioned as “Wottonian stage”. Finally, the article concludes by unveiling the third and last stage, the synthesis, which in Hegelian terms is not put into effect by Dorian and thus left incomplete due to the excessive hedonistic lifestyle that ultimately causes his own death.

The main reason for the Hegelian triad’s selection as the method of analysis in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is because it advocates a rational framework and a logical analysis of the text. Hegel’s fundamental goal in the dialectic is to prove the presence of a logical relationship between the numerous categories involved in the formation of experience (McTaggart, 2000: 8). Thus, in order to fully comprehend Dorian’s shift in character and the choices he makes, a Hegelian dialectic reading of this text is necessary. Many articles have scrutinised Wilde’s only novel using Hegelian philosophy but none of them have specifically conducted their analysis in light of the Hegelian triad. Therefore, this study contributes to Wildean studies and to scholarly research related to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by providing new perspectives and insight on this particular work of fiction.

Besides the dialectic method of selection, there are other arguments that combine Wilde and Hegel in this study. Wilde was quite popular among the philosophical networks of the Oxford Hegelians (Bennett, 2017: 154). In this context, Wilde’s *A House of Pomegranates, the Happy Prince and Other Tales* reflect Wilde’s interaction with Hegelian philosophy as these and other Wildean works were regarded as a combination of art and philosophy and he utilised a Hegelian dialectic framework for his own purposes (2017: 168). Wilde tried a unification of form and content, art and philosophy, in his early work, revealing the profound influence of Hegelian ideas. The author used Hegelian philosophy to establish a claim for himself, his aesthetic philosophy, and his cultural background as an Oxford-educated Irishman, a foreigner in England’s creative and cultural context (2017: 168). Moreover, it is argued that Hegelian philosophy maintains a framework for integrating

seemingly contradictory scientific and philosophical elements into Wilde's historical perspective (2017: 168). Hence, from his earlier works until the very last, Hegelian impact may be found not only in allusions but also in Wilde's use of form (2017: 169).

Hegel's attitude to opposing views and Spencer's Darwinian ideas, his positivism, and his coining of the phrase "survival of the fittest" may easily have piqued the young Wilde's interest (Bennett, 2017: 116). This use of Hegelian dialectic form also manifests itself in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The novel's core tensions revolve around two opposing conceptions of human nature. One stems from Walter Pater's aestheticist beliefs, while the other is based on a conventional Christian notion of the soul (Carroll, 2005: 287). As the narrative is based on multiple conflicts and contradictions, it is evident that Wilde used Hegelian forms in this novel as well. Wilde's interests are basically Hegelian, and he prefers to investigate mind rather than matter, although mind of the most complicated and nuanced kind (Macaulay, 1972: 15). Lastly, it is important to analyse Wilde's works in a linear manner because in Hegelian tradition, he always starts with an assumed thesis and concludes with a fresh synthesis (1972: ii-iii).

In this respect, the article will demonstrate, from a Hegelian dialectic perspective that as a naïve young man, the protagonist, Dorian becomes a victim of the dialectic choices he confronts in his early age, getting carried away in the antithesis stage and not being able to achieve a compromise, thus losing the chance to reach a synthesis. While the novel embodies many dialectic relationships between different characters, this article focuses on the protagonist and the dialectic path he takes throughout his quest. As a result, the significance of making the right/moral choices as well as the ability to achieve the synthesis stage is elaborated with specific references to the novel.

The Hegelian Triad: Thesis, Antithesis and Synthesis

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) was a German philosopher who is often regarded to be one of the leading thinkers of German idealism. Hegelian philosophy is known to have a significant and permanent impact on a wide variety of ideological, political, cultural and scientific movements of the 19th and 20th centuries (Baur, 2015: 1). In specific, Hegelian philosophy is an attempt to establish a systematic form of criticism, a system which "is self-critical, and systematic only through the absoluteness of its criticism" (Hegel, 1894: xvi). Logic maintains the all-encompassing first principle

which controls physics and ethics (1894: xvii). Hegel prioritises the logical world as: “the possibility of Nature and Mind” (1894: xvii).

One of Hegel’s most significant contributions to philosophy is his dialectics which has come to be known as the Hegelian dialectic triad. The focal point of Hegelian dialectics centres on three levels of development: “(1) a *thesis*, which is an idea or concept, (2) an *antithesis*, an opposite idea that contradicts the thesis, and (3) a *synthesis*, a climactic idea that somehow combines the thesis and the antithesis, into a sort of compromise” (Wheat, 2012: 10). Hegelian dialectics is thus based on the thesis-antithesis-synthesis triad. In the preface of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel refers to this dialectic system:

“The triadic form must not be regarded as scientific when it is reduced to a lifeless schema, a mere shadow, and when scientific organization is degraded into a table of terms. Kant rediscovered this triadic form by instinct, but in his work it was still lifeless and uncomprehended; since then it has, however, been raised to its absolute significance, and with it the true form in its true content has been presented, so that the Notion of Science has emerged” (Hegel, 1977: 29).

Thus, Hegel admits that he took it from Kant in order to give life to it by developing it from a lifeless scheme into a systematic and fully understood notion. To this end, the thesis-antithesis pair incorporates various antithetical oppositions such as “human and divine, God and human, subject-object, conscience and morality” etc. (Wheat, 2012: 11). For this reason, the thesis-antithesis opposition could be reinterpreted in terms of several other oppositional values. Therefore, Hegel utilised many other terms which denote thesis-antithesis-synthesis dialectics. To denote the thesis, Hegel used the terms: “primitive stage, first stage, first moment, first realization, the positive element, viz., the universal, unrealized [potential] essence, essence [potential], [the] universal, universality” (2012: 52). On the other hand, Hegel also referred to the antithesis as: “negation [No], the negative factor, the negative element, principle of negation, second attitude, second moment, second realization, stage of perception [consciousness, or conscious separation], self-estranged, self-alienated notion, estrangement, alienated” (2012: 52). Finally, the philosopher made use of the following terms to signify the synthesis: “synthetic unity of the first two propositions [thesis and antithesis], synthetic connection, negate thereby the negation, union, unification, third stage, third realization, third moment, reconciling affirmation, actual real essence, actualizing the universal, attains the form of universality, essence [actual]” (2012: 53). Thus, Hegel’s dialectic triad appeared under many disparate but equivalent names.

It is commonly known that Hegel based his dialectic triad on Johann Gottlieb Fichte's unconditional, absolute first maxim: "A = A, is a positing, a thesis; the second principle is a counter-positing, an antithesis; this latter should be partly conditioned, partly unconditioned (and so contradiction in itself)" (Hegel, 2010: 71). In this respect, the counter-positing is not necessarily the exact opposite of the positing or the thesis but rather a counter-idea, a conception that stands in contrast with the formerly expressed idea. In addition, the notion of the thesis also appears in Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* which "sets up four (cosmological) antinomies, the second of which deals with the antithesis to which the moments of quantity give rise" (2010: 157). However, the Kantian perspective of antinomies were considered to be faulty because it is internally difficult and quirky, as well as because the outcome is incorrect, assuming that cognition has no more kinds of thought than limited categories (Hegel, 2010: 157). Another point of view purports that the Hegelian dialectic triad was largely spread and popularised by Marx who strived to utilise Hegel's philosophical reason as the particular stages in economic development (Mueller, 1958: 413). It is a well-known fact that when Marx was a student at the University of Berlin, he became a member of the Hegel club where the philosopher's books were discussed (1958: 414). Another thinker who followed in Hegel's footsteps was Theodor Adorno who criticised the Enlightenment using a Hegelian dialectic approach. Hegel avers that:

"Any concept or structure that is 'posited' as independently subsisting necessarily undergoes a transformation into its opposite: this is the movement of dialectic. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel describes the eighteenth-century intellectual movement of the Enlightenment as being subject to just such a dialectic whereby it transformed into its supposed opposite, 'faith'" (Stone, 2014: 1119).

Hence, in critiquing the Enlightenment as a historical process, Adorno adheres to the dialectic framework established by Hegel. On the other hand, Adorno also seems to disapprove Hegel's dialectic philosophy while at the same time making use of it in his critique of the Enlightenment (2014: 1120). Adorno's attitude towards Hegelian dialectics seems dialectic altogether as he deems the Hegelian theory as: "having positive and negative aspects and he endeavours to extricate the positive aspects and forge his own philosophical approach from them" (2014: 1120). All in all, Kant and Fichte's influence on Hegel is obvious whereas Marx's involvement on the issue remains disputed. Lastly, Adorno comes forward as a thinker who made extensive use of Hegel's dialectic process.

Hegel goes on to assert that in the dialectic process there exist two basic movements: “(1) from thesis to antithesis and (2) from antithesis to synthesis” (Wheat, 2012: 57). The first movement is the one which describes the transition from thesis to antithesis. The antithesis, in its turn is depicted as “negativity” or in other words, “it is the No in the Yes-No-Yes (affirmation, negation, negation of the negation) triad” (2012: 57). The antithesis is specified by Hegel as something that ought to be disposed in order to attain the synthesis (2012: 60). In other words, once the synthesis stage is reached, the antithesis which is described by Hegel as “something alien” is thus abandoned (2012: 60).

Thus, the movement is referred to as “the dialectic method of progression” which describes the spirit in motion from the thesis to antithesis and finally to the synthesis (2012: 58). This movement occurs when the: “Spirit moves from unconscious union (thesis) to conscious separation (antithesis) the spirit becomes separated from itself when a human mind (spirit) mistakenly concludes that a perceived ‘object,’ which like all objects is spirit, is something ‘other’—other than itself, spirit” (Wheat, 2012: 58). The first movement from the thesis to antithesis is thereby described as being incomplete and faulty, embodying certain negative characteristics. However, it is the second movement, from the antithesis to synthesis which is described as “the moment of self-realisation” (2012: 59). This self-realisation is the second and final movement of the triad which is also referred to as the realisation of the truth (2012: 59). The spirit is thus expected to follow a dialectic path and as a result of these two movements it is eventually meant to achieve self-realisation.

Furthermore, Hegel’s dialectic process is also formulated as: “abstraction, dialectic proper, and the speculative” which is reduced to thesis-antithesis-synthesis (Stone, 2014: 1118). In addition, Hegel also maintained his opinion about the fact that dialectic oppositions necessitate compromise and settlement which in Hegelian terms meant the combination of disparities into a larger whole (2014: 1118). Additionally, according to Hegel’s dialectic system, all the categories follow one another in a sequential pattern conforming to a three-level process (2014: 1119-1120). Categories signify fundamental common notions that enable us to express the easiest concepts (Beiser, 2008: 113). However, Hegel indicates that due to their casualness, these categories are not always used intentionally but nonetheless, categories determine every day encounters (2008: 113).

The very first stage Hegel names abstraction is also formulated as “being” which is then described as: “the simplest and most inescapable category, necessarily presupposed in any thought or existence at all: anything that is must participate in being” (Stone, 2014: 1120). The second and particular stage which constitutes dialectism opposes the abstraction by reversing it to the antithesis and provides a counter-idea (2014: 1120). Finally, the third and last stage referred to as the synthesis or the speculative which is also entitled as an “overarching structure” that “provides resolution because an overarching structure has emerged of which the first and second moments are reduced to partial elements” (2014: 1123). As a result, the synthesis encompasses both the thesis and the antithesis, compensating both first and second stages to reach the speculative stage.

From an alternative point of view, Amber Samson emphasises that the strongest characteristic of Hegel’s dialectic triad lies in its potential of conducting the dialectic technique rather than the product obtained in the end of the process (Samson, 2019: 7). The researcher ascribes meaning to the dialectic method and infers that it ought to be made use of during the educational process (2019: 8). The scholar defines the dialectic as “a dynamic system in which a conflicting but reciprocal relationship exists between elements” and affirms that dialectic thinkers believe in the constantly changing nature of the universe (2019: 11). Samson adds that Hegel’s dialectic reasoning finds its origin in Greek dialectic thought, more specifically in Socrates’ “Socratic questions” which take up a dialectic method in questioning the human subject (2019: 17). Similarly, evidence of dialectic reasoning is also to be found in Plato’s works which rather than achieving wisdom via the Socratic method, “seeks to identify truth and reveal knowledge” (2019: 18). Consequently, in the era of German idealism, it was Johan Gottlieb Fichte who first described the triadic process, despite not using the terms thesis-antithesis-synthesis which forms the closest dialectic system compared to that of Hegel (2019: 20). The upcoming part of this study will interpret Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* according to Hegel’s dialectic triad of the thesis, antithesis and synthesis.

Dorian Gray’s Basillian Stage: The Thesis

Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* has been analysed from a wide variety of perspectives so far but this study scrutinises the novel from a dialectic point of view, specifically from the standpoint of Hegel’s dialectic triad. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a work of fiction which portrays and questions contradictory ideas and values which deems a dialectic reading of

the novel imperative. In this respect, the article identifies three stages in Wilde's narrative. The first stage, also coined the thesis stage manifests itself from the beginning of the novel, until the moment Dorian sees and reacts to his own picture presented to him by the painter, Basil Hallward. The opening chapter begins with the opposition between Basil and the aristocrat Lord Henry Wotton. Basil and Wotton do not seem to agree on topics concerning art, beauty and intellect. Wotton oversimplifies and generalises by stating that: "you have an intellectual expression, and all that. But beauty, real beauty, ends where an intellectual expression begins. Intellect is in itself a mode of exaggeration, and destroys the harmony of any face" (Wilde, 2000: 6-7). Wotton thus expresses his opinion that beauty and intellect do not mix and goes even further to degrade Dorian despite not knowing him in person:

"Your mysterious young friend, whose name you have never told me, but whose picture really fascinates me, never thinks. I feel quite sure of that. He is some brainless, beautiful creature, who should be always here in winter when we have no flowers to look at, and always here in summer when we want something to chill our intelligence. Don't flatter yourself, Basil: you are not in the least like him" (Wilde, 2000: 7).

It is obvious that Lord Henry Wotton is seriously biased towards Dorian although he has no clue about his actual personality. Wotton's prejudice against Dorian reveals the truth about his character and perspectives on life in general. The lord assumes that Dorian is an empty-headed, handsome youngster who should only be looked at and enjoyed solely for his beautiful looks and for nothing else. This reveals Wotton's mentality and the path of sin and self-destruction he is about to pave for Dorian.

Despite being mentioned very shortly in the novel, it is known and can be inferred that before seeing his own picture, Dorian led a relatively normal and average life as this is contrasted with the life he leads following his transformation after seeing the picture. The stark contrast established by Dorian's sharp change in lifestyle is equivalently reflected in the thesis and antithesis stages. From a Hegelian point of view, the thesis is also mentioned as "the first stage", "the essence" and "the potential". Thus, the thesis or in other words, his way of life before meeting the picture is a manifestation of Dorian's essence which is more under the influence of Basil. This essence also signifies his first stage of the beginning of his quest. In essence, Dorian is a naïve but reasonable young man who is still in pursuit of the recognition of his own identity. For this reason, Dorian is easily affected and has the ability to change his position quite suddenly. The thesis stage, or as I call it, the Basillian stage marks the starting point of the dialectic choices that

Dorian will make. Dorian's initial stage becomes more openly visible when Basil reveals some details about him to Lord Henry Wotton:

“The merely visible presence of this lad – for he seems to me little more than a lad, though he is really over twenty – his merely visible presence – ah! I wonder can you realize all that that means? Unconsciously he defines for me the lines of a fresh school, a school that is to have in it all the passion of the romantic spirit, all the perfection of the spirit that is Greek. The harmony of soul and body – how much that is!” (Wilde, 2000: 13).

Though being a normal (but exquisitely handsome) and naïve young man, it can be observed that Basil as a painter ascribes certain specific values to Dorian. These values reflect Basil's view of life as well as his perspectives on art. It becomes thereby clear that Dorian is ascribed specific values by two people from the beginning of the narrative: Basil Hallward and Lord Henry Wotton. Both of these characters not only ascribe a subjective meaning to Dorian but also anticipate to regard him from their own, personal perspectives. As a result, the ascribed meanings are completely disconnected from the reality and expose Basil and Wotton's subjective desires. Thus, both of these characters actually see Dorian as a mere tool, a subject they can easily manipulate and influence using their own value systems. It is therefore obvious that neither Basil nor Wotton actually cares about Dorian. Dorian simply reflects the manifestation of a fantasy that will turn their dreams and ambitions into reality. However, it needs to be noted that it is Basil Hallward who makes Dorian's picture with the intention of capturing his beauty forever and sharing it with the external world. Despite possessing artistic and good intentions, Basil will exert a short-lasting impact on Dorian which will eventually end with Dorian's violently murdering the creator of his own painting. All in all, Dorian's character experiences many dialectic fluctuations and for this reason, he is the most labyrinth of all characters (Day, 2019: 2). As an indecisive, naïve young man, Dorian is easily influenced and shaped by others, especially by Lord Henry Wotton. However, when we influence another individual, we cause them to embrace views that are not appropriate for them and as long as they are influenced by someone else, they will be distant from their own nature. Furthermore, because the goal of living is to become ourselves, we must avoid letting others to affect our lives (Shuttleworth, 2017: 190). Therefore, the character of Dorian incorporates several characters within the same body: “the separation of Beautiful Dorian, who is created by Lord Henry and is in ageless humanoid shape, and Thoughtful Dorian, who is created by Basil Hallward and depreciates in the portrait, acting as a conscience to Beautiful

Dorian” (Day, 2019: 2). This is an obvious manifestation of Dorian’s dialectic nature. In short, the thesis or the essence of Dorian Gray is in fact nothing but a fragile, indecisive and naïve young man who is not sure what to do with his life. In the initiation of the story, both Basil Hallward and Henry Wotton build upon this basis to construct different variations and eventually distortions of Dorian’s character.

Dorian Gray’s Wottonian Stage: The Antithesis

The most significant stage in Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is the antithesis which, in Hegelian terms is also described as the negation, estrangement and/or alienation. The antithesis is the prevalent, dominant stage in the novel, covering the majority of the narrative which comes into effect after Dorian sees his picture and makes the pact to surrender his soul in return for eternal youth and beauty. The antithesis will therefore be referred to as “the Wottonian stage” which possesses a focal place in the novel as told in the following lines:

“‘How sad it is!’ murmured Dorian Gray, with his eyes still fixed upon his own portrait. ‘How sad it is! I shall grow old, and horrible and dreadful. It will never be older than this particular day of June. . . . If it were only the other way! If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that – for that – I would give everything! Yes, there is nothing in the whole world I would not give! I would give my soul for that!’” (Wilde, 2000: 27-28).

This moment reflects the breaking point of the novel which sets into effect the antithesis or the negation of Dorian Gray. The negation of the Basillian stage reveals the hegemonic influence of Lord Henry Wotton on Dorian Gray. After this moment, Dorian basically transforms into a completely different personality, one that is constructed and controlled by Lord Henry Wotton. Dorian experiences an alienation/estrangement that seriously alters his identity. This mainly happens due to the fact that Dorian is convinced that Wotton’s philosophy and lifestyle is worth practising. Therefore, it is useful to look into Lord Henry Wotton’s philosophy and the ideals he stands for as he expresses these on various instances:

“I adore simple pleasures, said Lord Henry. They are the last refuge of the complex. But I don’t like scenes, except on the stage. What absurd fellows you are, both of you! I wonder who it was defined man as a rational animal. It was the most premature definition ever given. Man is many things, but he is not rational. I am glad he is not” (Wilde, 2000: 28).

To this end, Lord Henry Wotton makes his point clear by openly expressing his views about life. Another major reason of Dorian’s appeal to

Wotton's hedonist lifestyle is Dorian's social class and his father's impoverished condition (Safa and Sokhanvar, 2018: 20). Wotton's luxurious life of wealth and pleasure is that which Dorian envies so deeply. This envy is thus related to Dorian's feelings of social inferiority. Dorian finally gets the opportunity to live the life he has always longed for. Wotton is a fierce hedonist who views life as a platform to enjoy all possible opportunities. In this respect, Wotton's hedonism knows no limitations. All pleasures are acceptable in his point of view, both in physical and moral terms as Wotton does not acknowledge any type of moral constraints. At first Dorian finds himself between conflicting sides, in specific between Hallward and Wotton, but eventually chooses Wotton's views over those of Hallward and openly admits it: "Lord Henry Wotton is perfectly right. Youth is the only thing worth having. When I find that I am growing old, I shall kill myself" (Wilde, 2000: 28). Dorian is so much influenced and persuaded by Wotton that he even goes a step further to carry Wotton's ideas to an extreme level. The young man basically accepts hedonist philosophy as an "absolute truth" which is the only reason worth living for. Youth is the only thing worth enjoying. Once he grows old, all aspects about life will lose their meaning, thus youth and beauty combined with hedonism are the ideals "transferred" to Dorian through Henry Wotton. In this context, youth is associated with beauty which is considered an absolute form of pleasure. A definition of beauty purports that:

"Since [Beauty] is no creature of our reason, since it strikes us without any reference to use, and even where no use at all can be discerned... we must conclude that beauty is, for the greater part, some quality in bodies, acting mechanically upon the human mind by the intervention of the senses" (Burke, 1968: 91, 112).

Edmund Burke's definition of beauty draws attention to two aspects: firstly to the fact that beauty is of no practical use and secondly that it is perceived by the human mind via the senses. From a Hegelian dialectic stance, the antithesis or the Wottonian stage reflects the opposing/counter-idea of the thesis stage or the Basillian stage of Dorian Gray. In this respect, the idea that beauty is useless and that it is related to the senses is insistently repeated by Henry Wotton who carries on ascribing an extraordinary value on beauty: "People say sometimes that Beauty is only superficial. [...] But at least it is not so superficial as Thought is. To me, Beauty is the wonder of wonders. It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances" (Wilde, 2000: 24). Hence, in spite of being useless, beauty is described as the wonder amongst wonders and an ultimate desire that must be acquired.

In chapter 10, Wotton gives Dorian a yellow book as a gift, a French novel that tells the story of a wild hedonist. Within a short period of time, the yellow book manages to hold Dorian in its grip as he gets seriously affected by this Wottonian product that was soon about to become Dorian's guide for an extreme life of overindulgence.

However, Basil Hallward stands in total contrast with Wotton's ideals as he favours genius over beauty (Day, 2019: 5). Basil admits this in one of his meetings with the young man: "Dorian, from the moment I met you, your personality had the most extraordinary influence over me. I was dominated, soul, brain, and power by you" (Wilde, 2000: 110). Thus, despite being a painter by profession, Basil prioritises genius or intellect over plain physical beauty and highlights that he was impressed by Dorian's personality rather than his physical appearance (Day, 2019: 6). In chapter two, a dialogue between Basil and Dorian is of symbolic value: "I shall stay with the real Dorian, he said, sadly. Is it the real Dorian? cried the original of the portrait, strolling across to him. Am I really like that? Yes; you are just like that" (Wilde, 2000: 31). By uttering these words, Basil makes the distinction between the Dorian he envisioned and the Dorian created by Wotton's greed and never-ending lust. When he says that he will stay with the real Dorian, he actually means that he prefers to be with the Dorian whose character he admired during their primary meeting (Day, 2019: 6). This version of Dorian is now stuck in the picture whereas the Dorian he is conversing with is led astray by Henry Wotton's extremely hedonist and toxic ideas.

Nevertheless, Dorian concurs with Lord Henry's views and eventually gets carried away with them to metamorphose into an extremely hedonist version of the lord himself. Peter Raby upholds that: "Once the 'Hellenic ideal' upheld by Lord Henry Wotton inspires Dorian to enjoy unabated pleasures, every turn the young man takes in his life is definitely for the worse" (1997: 212). Hence, the dialectic struggle between Basil and Henry seems to be won by Henry and this could be interpreted as the victory of hedonism and beauty over the genius and intellect. It is worth noting that Dorian does not reflect with reason, intellect or rationality but rather rushes into hasty decisions and falls victim to the most alluring desires. For this reason, the novel is described as a work of fiction that: "celebrates symbolism, decadence, hedonism, a neo-Gothic imagination, and an early-modernist conception of *l'art pour l'art*" (Lawtoo, 2020: 214). Thus, it is obvious that the thesis and the antithesis manifest two different, opposing/conflicting personalities of Dorian Gray. While the Basillian

Dorian gets stuck in the painting, the Wottonian Dorian is alive and going at it at full speed. After this stage, the Wottonian Dorian becomes more and more hegemonic, gradually pushing Basil to the background and ignoring him. Along with Henry Wotton's new creation, Dorian starts to contradict and later on conflict with Basil mainly due to his opposing ideas which Dorian discards and shuns. This process eventually leads to Dorian's murder of Basil Hallward. This murder is of highly symbolical value because it represents Dorian's inability to obtain a reasonable balance from conflicting, dialectic ideas and also stands as a foreshadowing of the horrendous pain he will endure in the near future.

Thus, the Wottonian Dorian gets caught up in the antithesis and as expressed by Hegel, alienates and estranges himself from himself and his environment. He ignores his close friends and indulges himself into an irresponsible life of limitless joy and pleasure. Dorian's alienation and estrangement reaches such an extent that he eventually loses control of his desires and transforms into a pleasure-addict. This addictive condition drives Dorian towards madness: "As an avatar of Narcissus, Dorian Gray embodies both tendencies in a poisonous, self-negating confluence signifying madness" (Bloom, 2010: 72). Once Dorian sees the distortion in his picture, he perceives the degradation of his conscience and intends to reverse his destiny by embracing the values of the Basillian stage, genius and intellect. However, all of Dorian's attempts result in vain as he does not manage to fulfil that which he intends to do. The painting functions as a figurative and fantastic mirror, displaying a new expression of Dorian while first denying him any signs of epistemological guidance (Li, 2017: 566). From another perspective, Jan Gordon puts forward that Dorian Gray is re-created pictorially as an echoing, representational figure in Hallward's picture and philosophically in Sir Henry Wotton's materialistic beliefs, each of whom struggles for influence depicted as ideological seduction (2013: 38). Thus, Dorian prefers to lead his sinful life of joy and pleasure until the very last minute, perfectly aware of the picture's deterioration and the gradual destruction which he has conflicted upon himself. To conclude, the triangle relationship between Dorian, Basil and Henry is a very complex one where dialectic views make up the final outcome. However, the most important aspect for Dorian is to combine these dialectic views and to come up with a resolution where he is supposed to find the right path and reach a synthesis.

Dorian Gray's Lost Stage: The Synthesis

The third and last stage of Hegel's dialectic triad is the synthesis which was in the before mentioned pages defined as: "the third and last stage referred to as the synthesis or the speculative which is also entitled as an 'overarching structure' that provides resolution because an overarching structure has emerged of which the first and second moments are reduced to partial elements" (Stone, 2014: 1123). Therefore, the synthesis could in simple terms be paraphrased as a final stage of resolution that includes and combines the first and second stages. In other words, it is the final and ultimate "yes" in the "Yes-No-Yes" (affirmation, negation, negation of the negation) triad (Wheat, 2012: 57). For this reason, a resolution or settlement is required in order for the synthesis stage to be achieved.

Once Dorian gets immersed in his flamboyant lifestyle of pleasure seeking debauchery, there seems to be no turning back to a previous state or to a new condition that questions and reflects upon his errors to mediate any type of resolution. Ironically, after murdering Basil due to his opposing views which Dorian eventually despises, Dorian becomes even more hedonistic and soon loses control over his lust and earthly desires. Although being aware of the picture's hideous changes, he simply chooses to hide it and carry on with his joyful whereabouts:

"When the portrait finally shows details of its altered expression, the physical changes themselves no longer satisfy logical and rational expectations. They force Dorian to register his own sensory responses of disgust, fear, depletion of energy, and instinctive desire to hide the portrait from prying eyes" (Li, 2017: 567).

At the end of the novel, Dorian cannot stand looking at his picture. Therefore, he desperately decides to destroy it by stabbing the horrible portrait and destroying all evidence of his sins and debaucheries. By getting rid of the picture, Dorian actually hopes to erase all painful memories and to make up for his immoral lifestyle. Nonetheless, Dorian's final act is a desperate and unconscious act, a final attempt to reverse his destiny. Thus, forgetting that his actual soul and his real self are stuck in the picture, Dorian finally kills himself. Concerning Dorian's final outcome, it has been claimed that aesthetics brings about the destruction of ethics (Bolea, 2016: 78). In addition, Bolea compares Dorian's fall to the fall of Adam and Eve and defines it as a tragedy (2016: 73).

Considering Hegel's dialectic structure, it can be asserted that Dorian experiences the thesis and antithesis but does not reach the synthesis stage as he gets caught up in the antithesis, where he causes his own death. The

reason of Dorian's inability to reach the synthesis largely relies on the personal choices that he makes throughout the novel. After getting carried away with Henry Wotton's lifestyle and being aware that this causes him to gradually degenerate, Dorian does not even stop to reflect and question his new life. Instead, he continues with this lifestyle and pushes it even further to the utmost level. Dorian is unable to come to terms with his crimes and wrongdoings, even though he is aware of them. This inability is what prevents him from reaching the synthesis. In order for Dorian to reach the synthesis, an alternative ending would be required for this novel. This alternate ending would be one in which Dorian comes to terms with his mistakes and decides to face them rather than cover them up like he did in the actual ending. As a result, an alternate ending where Dorian reaches the synthesis would ensure the character's survival and well-being. However, in Wilde's original story, Dorian's pride and vanity impede him from acknowledging his faults and thus achieving the synthesis or the resolution.

Conclusion

Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a novel that presents various themes and issues in one single narrative. Having analysed the novel from a philosophical, Hegelian dialectic perspective, it has been concluded that Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* exhibits the Hegelian dialectic triad of the thesis, antithesis and synthesis. The thesis stage or the beginning is entitled as "the Basillian stage" due to the heavy presence and impact of the painter, Basil Hallward. Despite being mentioned very shortly in the early pages of the novel, the thesis stage sets the opening of Dorian's quest and is in stark contrast with the next stage. The second stage which forms the antithesis is coined as "the Wottonian stage" due to the prominent influence of the aristocratic hedonist, Lord Henry Wotton. The Wottonian stage displays a phase in which Dorian first comes under the influence of Wotton and later exceeds him and transcends all known boundaries to transform into a completely different character, a person that feeds from pleasure-seeking and a morally ignorant lifestyle. Though being aware of his moral decay through the deterioration in the picture, Dorian decides to cover up the painting, symbolically covering up the limitless life he enjoys so much and cannot give up. As a result, Dorian causes his self-destruction. Thus, experiencing the thesis and the antithesis or the Basillian and Wottonian stages, Dorian is incapable of reaching the synthesis and coming up with any form of resolution. Dorian's incompetence to reach the synthesis is largely owing to his vanity and his inability to acknowledge and reconcile his own mistakes. From a different outlook, the rise and fall of Dorian Gray might be

interpreted as a moral allegory designed to criticise, rather than encourage, the act of following one's instincts as mindlessly and diligently as aestheticism mandates (Duggan, 2008: 61).

In conclusion, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* manifests the utmost importance of the dialectic nature of human kind. In particular, through the protagonist, Wilde demonstrates the significance of making the correct choices through reason, intellect and morality especially at a young age. In short, through a Hegelian dialectic reading of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, it has been established that Wilde uncovers the dialectic fluctuations that human beings may experience. However, the crucial aspect of these dialectic fluctuations is to be able to finally achieve the synthesis or the resolution. Nonetheless, Wilde's protagonist, Dorian does not manage to reach the synthesis stage and gets carried away in the antithesis, bringing about his own doom. Hence, the ending of Wilde's canonical novel actually urges human beings to reflect on the dialectic choices they make and stresses the importance of being able to achieve the synthesis, in other words to reach a compromise after the thesis and its negation, the antithesis. Wilde's objective is to pursue beauty and enjoyment in life and he also emphasises that the repercussions of one's actions must be carefully weighed, as well as the influence of one's decisions on others (Duggan, 2008: 67). All in all, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* portrays an exemplary narrative which incorporates the manifestation of Hegelian dialectics in general and the dialectic triad in specific.

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A HEGELIAN DIALECTIC READING OF OSCAR WILDE'S
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