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Kimlikleri konumlandırmada çevresel faktörlerin rolü: The Picture of Dorian Gray romanında Dorian Gray karakterinin liminal pozisyonu / Yılmaz, Ö.

81. The role of surrounding factors in positioning identities: liminality of Dorian Gray in Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray[1]

Özlem YILMAZ[2]

Abstract

Masculinity theory, which has been executing its studies as a distinct branch of interest since 1980s, primarily aims to draw attention to the multiplicity of masculinities to undermine the misconception that there is a single, universal, and everlasting concept of masculinity (Sancar, 2009, p. 26), and it also tries to exhibit the fact that masculine identities are always subject to change in relation to surrounding factors such as ideology and historical elements. Similarly, literary masculinity studies aim to foreground the presence of this multiplicity and variety in literary texts, as well as depicting and pointing out the portrayal of non-hegemonic masculine identities who have the potential of constituting alternatives to the hegemonic ones. In accordance with this target, this study aims to investigate Oscar Wilde's 1890 novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, by concentrating on the fluid identity of its male protagonist with the purpose of exhibiting the fact that even the hegemonic masculinities are subject to change in different contexts. Embodying an alternative masculine identity which is in great contrast with the expectations of hegemonic gender ideology concerning masculinity ideals on one hand, Dorian becomes a hegemonic masculinity model in his own context on the other, which demonstrates the fact that there is not a single and universal type of masculinity, but rather "masculinities" even in the same time interval, culture, and society, and that identities are context-bounded, continuously taking new shapes in relation to surrounding factors.

Keywords: British novel, Oscar Wilde, fin de siécle

Kimlikleri konumlandırmada çevresel faktörlerin rolü: The Picture of Dorian Gray romanında Dorian Gray karakterinin liminal pozisyonu

Öz

1980'lerden itibaren çalışmalarını bağımsız bir araştırma alanı olarak yürütmekte olan erkeklik teorisi, esas olarak erkekliklerin çeşitlilik ve çokluk durumuna dikkat çekerek, yalnızca tek, evrensel ve genel geçer bir erkek kimliğinin var olabileceği yanılgısını çürütmeyi (Sancar, 2009, p. 26) ve ayrıca erkek kimliklerinin kendilerini çevreleyen ideoloji, tarihsel unsurlar vb. faktörlerin etkisiyle her zaman değişime mahkûm oldukları gerçeğini gözler önüne sermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Benzer şekilde edebiyatta erkeklik çalışmaları da edebi eserleri inceleme yoluyla erkek kimliklerindeki çeşitlilik ve çokluğa dikkat çekmek ve hegemonik erkekliklere alternatif oluşturma potansiyeli bulunan ve hegemonik olmayan erkek kimliği betimlemelerini öne çıkarmak amacını taşımaktadır. Nitekim bu çalışmanın amacı da Oscar Wilde'ın 1890 tarihinde basılmış olan *The Picture of Dorian*

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Gray adlı romanını ana erkek karaktere yoğunlaşarak erkeklik teorisi bağlamında incelemek suretiyle hegemonik erkekliklerin bile farklı ortam ve bağlamlarda ne şekilde değişim gösterdiklerini ortaya koymaktır. Bir yandan bünyesinde hegemonik ideolojinin cinsiyet algısıyla çelişen bir alternatif erkek kimliği barındıran Dorian Gray karakteri, diğer yandan kendi kontekstinde etrafındaki erkeklikler için örnek teşkil eden bir hegemonik erkeklik modeli olduğundan, erkek kimliklerinin bağlam-bağımlılığını ve sabit olmayan yapılarını ortaya koyması açısından incelenmeye uygun bulunmuştur. Bu yönleriyle Dorian Gray karakteri, aynı zaman dilimi içerisinde, aynı kültürde ve toplumda bile tek bir hegemonik erkeklik modeli ya da genel geçer bir erkek kimliğinden bahsedilemeyeceğini ve çoklu ve çeşitli erkeklikler olduğunu göstermekte olduğundan, edebiyatta erkeklik teorisinin amaçlarıyla uyum içerisindedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: İngiliz romanı, Oscar Wilde, fin de siécle

Introduction

Published precisely at the beginning of nineteenth century *fin de siécle*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is the only novel which can be encountered in Oscar Wilde's oeuvre, who is frequently commemorated as one of the greatest dramatists of British literature. The novel was harshly criticized when it was first published because of the morally degenerate lifestyle it presented to the reader and upon the critiques, Wilde republished his novel in 1891 with a preface added in it, in which he explained his aestheticist philosophy of arts and literature, thus, identifying the so-called immoral lifestyle he created in it with the aestheticist motto of "art for art's sake". In terms of masculinity studies, on the other hand, the novel is significant because of its demonstration of the multiplicity and unstable nature of masculinities through the variety of non-hegemonic masculine identities portrayed by Wilde, thus, realising what today's masculinity theory tries to achieve a century earlier. Aiming to draw attention to the varieties in the experiencing and perception of masculinities in different cultures, historical periods or contexts, the theory of masculinity primarily underlines the fact that there are alternative masculinities other than the hegemonic form of masculinity and that these alternative types should be foregrounded so as to emphasize the possibility of the transformation of hegemonic gender norms in patriarchal societies. The field has a crucial importance as the complementary part of the feminist studies, thus, constituting one of the main branches of gender studies.

The main mottos of the masculinity theory are the notion of the impossibility of a single type of masculinity and the suggestion that there are other masculinities which stand as alternatives to the hegemonic types of masculinities in both different and the same contexts. Early masculinity studies which were executed in late 1980s concentrated on the definition of masculinity and the renouncement of the idea that there was a single, unchanging, and stable masculinity; whereas in 1990s, it was began to be emphasized in the field that masculinities should be evaluated in terms of subjective, individual, and specific contexts (Sancar, 2009, p. 26). In 1993, *Men's Studies Review*, one of the key publishings on masculinity, changed its name into *Masculinities*, politically implying that masculinity studies were not a reaction against women's studies (Mc Carry, 2007, p. 407). In Connell's view, most of the research conducted in the field were "empirical" in these early times and they outlined the "construction of masculinities in specific settings", also concentrating on the "historical accounts of changing ideas of masculinity" (2005, p. xiv). This kind of research were initiated in Australia first, and Australia was followed by the United States of America and Britain. Beginning with Connell's claim in "Masculinities and Globalization" concerning the necessity of "re-contextualis[ing] the field this time by a multidisciplinary macro-understanding that considers factors like economics and politics, production

and consumption, as well as ideas and ideologies at various levels", the idea that the tenets of the field should be updated in a such a way that it should become capable of dealing with the "new types of power and its gendered distributions" began to dominate the field (Sorensen, 2000, p. 43). As a result, an awareness regarding the fluidity and continuously changing structure of the masculinity forms increased among the masculinity theoreticians (43), which constitutes the focal point of this study too.

The most significant facts that the masculinity studies try to demonstrate are that "masculinity is a changing phenomenon", that "it is fluid", and that we should "think about and study it as something ever changing and in movement" (Reeser, 2010, p. 4). As critic and anthropologist Vera Nunning expresses, "the problematic of constructing a masculine identity is less one of a biological or genetic nature but is instead primarily situated at the intersection of literary and cultural history" (in Horlacher, 2011, p.3). What masculinity studies mainly aim, therefore, is to demonstrate the fact that masculinity, just like femininity, is not a biological and natural construct but something acquired in time.

What most of the masculinity studies scholars coherently strive for, as mentioned, is the exhibition of "the fluidity and instability of masculine identities by revealing their constructions as social processes, the outcomes of self-other interactions informed by historically situated discursive practices" (Smart and Yeats, 2008, p. 4). By "examining" the concept of masculinity in order to "destabilize stereotypes of masculinities" (Reeser, 2010, p. 15), the field mainly targets to pave the way for alternative masculinity models and to move away the pressure operated on men through societal values and expectations as well as the anxiety experienced by male individuals as a result of these pressures. Three connoisseurs of the field, Connell, Hearn, and Kimmel summarize how they scrutinize masculinities with these purposes as follows:

> by a specific, rather than an implicit or incidental focus on the topic of men and masculinities; by taking account of feminist, gay and other critical gender scholarship, by recognising men and masculinities as explicitly gendered rather than nongendered, by understanding men and masculinities as socially constructed, produced and reproduced rather than as somehow just "naturally" one way or another; by seeing men and masculinities as variable and changing across time (history) and space (culture), within societies, and through life courses and biographies, by emphasizing men's relations, albeit differentially, to gendered power, by spanning both the material and the discursive in analysis and focusing on the intersecting of gender with other social divisions in the construction of masculinities. (2005, p. 3)

These vital points concerning the ways masculinities should be approached while analysing them are used by many different scholars in the field, furthermore, ideas and studies of these three significant names who are known as the experts of the theory, Raewyn W. Connell, Jeff Hearn, and Michael Kimmel serve as a road map for the academicians executing masculinity studies.

According to Connell, the field aims to realize five things: first of all, it tries to "trace the history of the modern investigation of masculinity", secondly, by presenting a theory of masculinities, it tries to reveal a social theory of gender, thirdly, it "describes four groups of men caught up in the process of change". Fourthly, it analyses the political expressions of Western masculinities in relation to history. Last but not the least, it makes suggestions of "strategies for the politics of gender equality" (Connell, 2005, p. xi). Moving from Connell's words, it can be concluded that one of the basic aims of the field – which he expresses as tracing the origins of the modern investigation of masculinity – necessitates the unveiling of the past efforts of those who tried to do what today's masculinity theorists try to do earlier, which also constitutes one of the aims of this study. Hence, one can state that masculinity studies in general ask questions concerning the construction of masculinities, examines how the construction process is a fluid one, demonstrates that it differs in different societal, cultural, and historical contexts and investigates

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how do men – as the victims of the patriarchal system – resist or internalise the hegemonic ideals of masculinity with their actions or attitudes. In parallel with this aim, it is of vital importance to investigate the construction of masculinities in literature, and to demonstrate this status of men as victims of the patriarchal system.

Literary masculinity studies is a field of study in close connection with both men's studies and gender studies, and it aims to have a contribution in the solution of the problem regarding, as Horlacher states in the above given example, "the understanding of masculinity" (2011, p. 12). Scholars of this field aim to "expose the damaging impact of patriarchy on men (as well as women)" and to "celebrate alternative masculinities over hegemonic ideals through an analysis of male protagonists" (Hobbs, 2013, p. 383). They also criticize the theoretical claim "that men are already adequately represented in literary theory" and dispute the universalization of masculinities by foregrounding "sub-categorisations of masculinity" such as "class, race, and sexuality" (Hobbs, 2013, p.383).To conclude, both the sociological and the literary masculinity studies aim to change the heteronormative gender order's damaging effects on the lives of men. Scholars of these fields believe that the most direct path towards this change passes through the rejection of hegemonic masculinity types and promoting the construction of the emergence of alternative masculinity types which would replace them, which makes Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* a very appropriate target for analysis.

Although almost all the major and minor male characters demonstrate non-hegemonic or alternative masculinity characteristics in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the protagonist of the novel – Dorian Gray constitutes a perfect example for alternative masculinities in his decadent lifestyle, dandy-aesthete philosophy, and subversion of hegemonic masculinity ideals. He serves as a true model for the demonstration of the unstable and fluid nature of masculinities. His unstable masculine identity is in perfect accordance with masculinity theory's claim that even the hegemonic masculinities are subject to change in different contexts, times, and cultures. In his demonstration of the possibility of the existence and self-approval of alternative masculinities, the ec-centric male protagonist Dorian Gray is very appropriate for a masculinity analysis. A very apparent example of the alternative masculinity model of "the dandy" at the beginning of the novel, Dorian adopts different masculinities as the novel progresses and embodies multiple masculine identities such as "the aesthete" who believed that "art was an individual effort and included both fine art and such familiar items as houses, furniture, wallpaper, china, clothing, artificial flowers and the broad field of decorative arts"(Rogers et al 252), and "the decadent" who followed the philosophy of *decadence* which which "manifested itself in an extreme aestheticism which despised the natural, worshipped the artificial, and preferred beauty to morality" (Bell, 2006, p. 285) followed the philosophy of aestheticism through promoting a decadent way of living isolated from the concerns of hegemonic ideology, both of which constituted alternatives for the hegemonic masculinity model of the period, which was the middle-class economic man. Unlike the members of aristocracy who "had maintained a vestigial sense of Athenian manliness in a life devoted not to labour for monetary gain, but to honourable obligation to serve the King and state as warriors or public servants", identity of the middle-class economic man was based on the "individual self-interest motivated by rational calculation of economic gain" (Sussman, 2012, p.81). With all these alternative masculine identities he embodies in his identity, Dorian Gray steps ahead as a perfect example of alternative masculinities and demonstrates the possibility of the existence of non-hegemonic masculinities against the prevailing hegemonic gender ideology. For all these reasons, the aim of this study is to investigate Oscar Wilde's 1890 novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, by concentrating on the fluid identity of its male protagonist with the purpose of exhibiting the fact that even the hegemonic masculinities are subject to change in different contexts. Embodying an alternative masculine identity

which is in great contrast with the expectations of hegemonic gender ideology on one hand, Dorian becomes a hegemonic masculinity model in his own context on the other, which demonstrates the fact that there is not a single and universal type of masculinity, but rather "masculinities" even in the same time interval, culture, and society, and that identities are context-bounded, continuously taking new shapes in relation to surrounding factors.

The fluid nature of masculinities and Dorian Gray's unstable identity oscillating between alternative and hegemonic masculinity positions

A sixteen-year-old young dandy-aesthete at the beginning of the novel, Dorian Gray constitutes a perfect example for the demonstration of the unstable and fluid nature of masculinities. Dorian's unstable masculine identity is in perfect accordance with masculinity theory's claim that even the hegemonic masculinities are subject to change in different contexts, times, and cultures. Being an alternative masculinity who is in great contrast with the expectations of hegemonic gender ideology concerning masculinity ideals on one hand, Dorian becomes a hegemonic masculinity in his own context on the other, which demonstrates the fact that there is not a single and universal type of masculinity, but rather "masculinities" even in the same time interval, culture, and society.

Demonstrating its continuous change "[w]ith innumerable variations in time and space", the concept and construction of masculinities are "more complicated than we might first believe and, consequently, masculinity can be studied not as a single definition, but as a variety and complexity" (Reeser, 2010, p.2). Position of Dorian Gray as an unstable and fluid masculinity, moving between the alternative and hegemonic masculinity positions, is a perfect example of this complexity. Demonstrating one of the basic claims of masculinity theory that "masculine identities are flexibly constructed and deployed in a variety of contexts or settings" (Edley, 2006, p. 601), Dorian Gray makes the novel a perfect subject matter for masculinity analysis. His fluid identity, which can be considered as an extraordinarily non-hegemonic masculinity for most of the individuals in society on one hand, and as a hegemonic masculinity for the people in his environment on the other hand, is supportive of Phillip Mallet's idea that masculinity is a relational construct "shaped by and within the totality of gender relations"; and that these relations are in continuous change, so is the "notion of what constitutes" manhood (2015, p. vi). Dorian Gray ,who is regarded as an outsider for the hegemonic ideology of society at the beginning of the novel becomes a hegemonic masculinity model for many young men throughout the novel who are mesmerised with Dorian's sophisticated personality.

Concerning the contradictory but crucial role a dandy undertakes in a patriarchal society, Meinhold asserts that "dandy's self-reflection in the glass and societal mirror is both a reflection and a repetition: the mirroring not only results in a counter-image but also in a constantly repeated mirroring" (2013, p. 115). What Meinhold means with these words is that there is a two-way relationship between the dandy and the society he tries to revolt against. In his uprise against hegemony, the dandy primarily "examines the society" (2013, p. 116). In other words, "society allows itself to be examined by him and imitates the dandy. Before he becomes the mirror of society, the dandy is the model that it imitates" (2013, p. 116). Thus, through this flux and refluxes, for some masculinities, dandy becomes a powerful model of hegemonic masculinity while he is also an alternative masculinity when evaluated in the framework of the prevailing patriarchal gender order. This fluid position of Dorian proves masculinity theory's claim that masculinity is a fluid and ever-changing phenomenon. The following scene of the novel, in which Wilde defines Dorian's hegemonic position in the eyes of the younger men revolving around him in social

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circles clearly exhibits the possibility of an alternative masculine identity's transformation into a hegemonic one, at least for a particular layer of society:

> Indeed, there were many, especially among the very young men, who saw, or fancied that they saw, in Dorian Gray, the true realization of a type, of which they had often dreamed in Eton or Oxford days, a type that was to combine something of the real culture of the scholar with all the grace and distinction and perfect manner of a citizen of the world. To them, he seemed to be of the company of those whom Dante describes as having sought to make themselves perfect by the worship of beauty. Like Gautier, he was one for whom the visible world existed. And, certainly, to him life itself was the first, the greatest, of the arts, and for it all the other arts seemed to be but a preparation. Fashion, by which what is really fantastic becomes for a moment universal, and dandyism, which, in its own way, is an attempt to assert the absolute modernity of beauty, had, of course, their fascination for him. His mode of dressing, and the particular styles that from time to time he affected, had their marked influence on the young exquisites of the Mayfair balls and Pall Mall club windows, who copied him in everything that he did, and tried to reproduce the accidental charm of his graceful, though to him only half-serious, fopperies (Wilde, 1891, p.134-135).

What can be deduced from Wilde's quotation above is that Dorian serves as not only an aesthetic influence but also as an exemplary model of alternative masculinity for the young men in his environment. In Meinhold's interpretation, this transformation taking place in the masculine status of Dorian as an alternative masculinity turning into a hegemonic one is directly related to his adoption of dandyism in which the male individual "breaks conventions and in so doing often creates new ones" (2013, p.116). This subversion of conventional masculine ideals becomes attractive for many young men who reluctantly conform to the hegemonic masculinity expectations and look for ways to face their true selves. When considered in this scope, in accordance with Meinhold's description that "dandy is someone who never merely follows fashion – as does the fool of fashion – but is even a step ahead of fashion, which instead possibly follows him" (2013, p. 117), Dorian Gray can clearly be classified as a dandy who creates his own hegemonic masculine position, since, as Wilde's description of Dorian in the above given quotation demonstrates, Dorian becomes the initiator of a new fashion, a new model of masculinity for some other non-hegemonic masculinities. Although he becomes a hegemonic masculine model for these young men, with his leadership, he opens the way for the existence of non-hegemonic alternative masculinities too. By creating an alternative masculinity like Dorian who is capable of functioning as a model for many other male individuals despite the hegemonic gender norms, Wilde demonstrates the possibility of the emergence, survival, and development of alternative masculinities in a patriarchal and oppressive society, which makes the novel in complete accordance with the aims of masculinity theory. As we have mentioned before, Dorian Gray embodies multiple alternative masculinities throughout the novel such as the dandy, the aesthete, and the decadent. His alternative masculine identity as a dandy is only one of these alternative masculine identities. The knife-edge position of the dandy, which makes Dorian oscillate between the positions of alternative and hegemonic masculinities and his rejection of hegemonic gender roles is the exact reason which makes Dorian a fluid masculinity.

Dorian's "aesthete" masculine identity, on the other hand, foregrounds itself in two events, both of which are of vital significance in terms of the plot construction of the novel. Resulting from Dorian's aestheticist worship for beauty and art, both events change the course of Dorian's life in different dimensions. First of these events is Dorian's relationship with Sibyl Vane, which results in her suicide because of Dorian's aestheticist worship towards her. Rather than falling in love with Sibyl's character, Dorian falls in love with her aesthetic quality, her identity as an actress, and her perfect beauty, which he sees as part of her artistic aspect. In his first explanation to Lord Henry about his falling in love with

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Sibyl, Dorian emphasises the fact that he is in love "with an actress" (Wilde, 1891, p. 52). He describes Sibyl Vane to Lord Henry with the following words:

> But Juliet! Harry, imagine a girl, hardly seventeen years of age, with a little, flowerlike face, a small Greek head with plaited coils of dark-brown hair, eyes that were violet wells of passion, lips that were like the petals of a rose. She was the loveliest thing I had ever seen in my life. You said to me once that pathos left you unmoved, but that beauty, mere beauty, could fill your eyes with tears. I tell you, Harry, I could hardly see this girl for the mist of tears that came across me. And her voice − I never heard such a voice. It was very low at first, with deep mellow notes that seemed to fall singly upon one's ear. Then it became a little louder and sounded like a flute or a distant hautboy (Wilde, 1891, p. 55).

Even in these first explanations regarding Sibyl Vane, Dorian's interest is obviously related to artistic pleasure rather than sincere feelings of love. His description of her is dominated by expressions underlining her aesthetic qualities like the beauty of her face and the artistic quality of her voice rather than her positive character qualities. Even though his relationship with Sibyl Vane is based on aesthetic motivations, Dorian Gray decides to marry her. When he tells this intention to Lord Henry and Basil in Chapter 6, their reaction demonstrates Dorian's alternative and non-hegemonic masculine identity again: "But think of Dorian's birth, and position, and wealth. It would be absurd for him to marry so much beneath him" (Wilde, 1891, 79). By disregarding the class difference between him and Sibyl Vane, Dorian's decision of marrying Sibyl is a revolt against the hegemonic ideology and this choice of him reflects his non-hegemonic masculine identity again.

In Chapter 7, Dorian takes Basil and Lord Henry to the night-club-like theatre where Sibyl is performing, and upon witnessing that her performance is very different from her usual ones, Dorian becomes very disappointed. Frustrated by the low artistic quality of her performance, Dorian's dreams about marrying Sibyl fall apart. Wilde portrays this striking scene as follows: "Dorian Gray grew pale as he watched her. He was puzzled and neither of his friends dared to say anything to him. She seemed to them to be absolutely incompetent. They were horribly disappointed" (1891, p.89). Unaware of the level of the disappointment Dorian is experiencing, Sibyl, who "was transfigured with joy", explains the reason for her deteriorating performance capacity with the following words: "before I knew you, acting was the one reality of my life. It was only in the theatre that I lived. I thought that it was all true" (1891, p. 92). The deep implications in her sentences and the greatness of her love, which makes her loose the high quality of her artistic performances does not touch Dorian's heart at all. His answer to Sibyl's sincere explanation demonstrates the fact that his feelings towards her were nothing but an aesthetic passion:

> Yes, he cried, you have killed my love. You used to stir my imagination. Now you don't even stir my curiosity. You simply produce no effect. I loved you because you were marvellous, because you had genius and intellect, because you realized the dreams of great poets and gave shape and substance to the shadows of art. You have thrown it all away. You are shallow and stupid. My God! How mad I was to love you! What a fool I have been! You are nothing to me now. I will never see you again (Wilde, 1891, p. 93).

Exhibiting Dorian's alternative masculine identity as an aesthete, these lines also demonstrate that Dorian can leave a woman behind, without even considering the moral aspect of the situation or her psychological condition. Although Sibyl begs him not to leave her, Dorian leaves the theatre mercilessly. After leaving Sibyl in a devastated position without caring what her life would be like after him, Dorian finds solace in aesthetic pleasure again: "The air was heavy with the perfume of the flowers, and their beauty seemed to bring him an anodyne for his pain" (1891, p.95). At that moment, however, comes the climax of the novel, Dorian realizes the transformation which took place on the face of the portrait and

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the "cruel" expression makes him realise that the transformation has taken place in relation to his cruel treatment of Sibyl:

> Suddenly there flashed across his mind what he had said in Basil Hallward's studio the day the picture had been finished. Yes, he remembered it perfectly. He had uttered a mad wish that he himself might remain young, and the portrait grow old; that his own beauty might be untarnished, and the face on the canvas bear the burden of his passions and his sins; that the painted image might be seared with the lines of suffering and thought, and that he might keep all the delicate bloom and loveliness of his then just conscious boyhood (Wilde, 1891, p.96).

The following morning, while Dorian reconsiders the situation and thinks that it would be appropriate to marry the young girl to conceal his sins appearing in the portrait, Lord Henry informs him that Sibyl has committed suicide and lost her life: "Dorian did not answer for a few moments. He was dazed with horror. Finally, he stammered, in a stifled voice, Harry, did you say an inquest?" (Wilde, 1891, p.103). Even upon receiving such terrifying news, which reveal that he caused an innocent girl to commit suicide, Dorian gets anxious for himself rather than feeling sorry for Sibyl Vane. His selfishness is very apparent in following sentences: "You don't know the danger I am in, and there is nothing to keep me straight. She would have done that for me. She had no right to kill herself. It was selfish of her" (Wilde 1891, p.105). Blaming Sibyl of being selfish and ignoring his fault in her death ironically, Dorian exhibits an immoral attitude in that moment and the reader understands that the corrupting influences of Lord Henry has been effective in leading Dorian to a decadent and degenerate lifestyle.

Despite this traumatic event, Dorian decides that he should lead a careless life based on pleasures and have no moral concerns. As Wilde strikingly expresses, "he felt that the time had really come for making his choice. Or had his choice already been made? Yes, life had decided that for him – life, and his own infinite curiosity about life. Eternal youth, infinite passion, pleasures subtle and secret, wild joys, and wilder sins – he was to have all these things" (1891, p.110). It is at this moment that Dorian chooses to become a decadent man in order not to make a compromise with his beauty. From that moment on, Dorian is dragged into a decadent and even a degenerate lifestyle. It is a very easy choice for him since "the portrait was to bear the burden of his shame: that was all" (1891, p.111). Nothing would damage his beauty, "not one blossom of his loveliness would ever fade. Not one pulse of his life would ever weaken" (1891, p.111). In fact, the extreme level of importance that Dorian grants for beauty – and especially to his own beauty – is clearly demonstrative of his aesthetic tendency. The ec-centric masculine identity of Dorian as an aesthete reveals itself most obviously right after the suicide of Sibyl and the following speech demonstrates the extraordinary amount of passion, he has for aesthetic value even in case of tragic events:

> No, said Dorian Gray, there is nothing fearful about it. It is one of the great romantic tragedies of the age. As a rule, people who act lead the most commonplace lives. They are good husbands, or faithful wives, or something tedious. You know what I mean, middle-class virtue and all that kind of thing. How different Sibyl was! She lived her finest tragedy. She was always a heroine. (Wilde, 1891, p. 115)

With this approach, Dorian does not even experience a mourning process and begins to lead a more decadent way of life, which becomes almost degenerate towards the end of the novel. The "decadent" masculine identity of Dorian comes forward in the book most apparently when he explains that his life was changed forever upon reading a yellow book. As Bell states, "The aesthete-hedonists" Dorian Gray "shares a debt to J. K. Huysmans' *À Rebours*" (2006, p. 285) which is very apparent in the novel as the following quotation demonstrates:

> Things of which he had never dreamed were gradually revealed. It was a novel without a plot and with only one character, being, indeed, simply a psychological study of a certain young Parisian who spent

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his life trying to realize in the nineteenth century all the passions and modes of thought that belonged to every century except his own, and to sum up, as it were, in himself the various moods through which the world-spirit had ever passed, loving for their mere artificiality those renunciations that men have unwisely called virtue, as much as those natural rebellions that wise men still call sin (Wilde, 1891, p. 131).

After adopting decadence as a lifestyle with the influence of this book, Dorian corrupts many young men and drags them into a similar lifestyle, which results in his having a bad reputation even among the dandy-aesthetes. Therefore, Dorian's alternative masculine status is renewed towards the end of the novel and even for his own environment where he is accepted as a hegemonic masculinity model by many people, he becomes an ec-centric and alternative masculinity type again.

Conclusion

Upon analysing the novel through masculinity theory's perspective, the study has concluded that portrayal of the male protagonist Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde serves to the purposes of literary masculinity theory in its demonstration of the fact that masculine identities are in a continuous process of change, that they are unstable, context-dependant, and relational. Although most of the masculine identities are defined in relation to the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, which is the dominant form of masculinity in a specific context, unaccustomed but powerful alternative masculinities like Dorian have the potential of subverting the hegemonic gender ideology and create new versions of hegemonic masculine identities in their own contexts. Hence, the fluid characteristic of Dorian's identity exhibits the fact that hegemonic masculine identities are also changeable since every period, every culture, and every society may have various understandings of hegemonic gender norms.

Scrutinizing Dorian Gray resulted in the conclusion that he adopted different masculine identities throughout the novel to embody multiple masculine identities such as the "dandy", the "aesthete", and the "decadent"– all of which constituted alternatives for the hegemonic masculinity model of the period, which was the "middle-class economic man". Demonstrating the possibility of the construction and maintenance of alternative masculine identities against Victorian hegemonic gender ideology, Dorian exhibited all qualities of masculinities that were unstable, relational, and context-dependant. Liminal characteristic of Dorian's masculine identity oscillating between the positions of alternative and hegemonic masculinities validated masculinity theory's suggestion that "hegemonic masculinity models are also vulnerable to change since every period, culture, and society may have different understandings of masculinities" (Horlacher vii). Through this character, the novel challenged the traditional gender understanding of British society; moreover, it exposed the significant potential of alternative masculinities in subverting the hegemonic gender ideology through their creation of new versions of hegemonic masculinities in their own contexts. For this reason, with this alternative masculine identity he created in his ground-breaking novel, Oscar Wilde revolted against the rooted hegemonic masculinity understandings, and he did what the contemporary masculinity theorists aim to do today more than a century earlier by demonstrating the fact that even the hegemonic forms of masculinities are also in continuous change. Wilde's revolt against the hegemonic masculinity understandings did not solely consist of the alternative masculinities he created in his works, he also realised this through his personal life. He was accused of sodomy, which was a stain to his well-established career. With the effect of those accusations, the attitude of the British society towards Wilde continuously deteriorated and this created a pressure on legal authorities, which influenced the course of the trials too.Though Wilde knew that he would be excluded from the society, in his trials, he nevertheless "told the truth about his homosexual desires, when he should have worn the mask of insincerity" (Belford,1997, p.334). This honesty and

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The role of surrounding factors in positioning identities: liminality of Dorian Gray in Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray /
Yılmaz, Ö.

acceptance "emphasized his lack of guilt – conscious and unconscious – concerning his homosexual acts" (Belford, 1997, p.340). As a result, Wilde was "sentenced for two years of imprisonment with hard labour" (Belford, 1997, p. 340). After completing his sentence, because of the negative reactions of British society against him, "Wilde came out of one prison into another, and the second prison needed more courage to face than the first, for social ostracism has its own peculiar inquisition which petrifies the emerging spirit and kills what is already crushed" (Ellis 194). For this reason, Wilde did not leave France until his death in 1900 and tried to leave behind his reputation in Britain. As Belford asserts, "before he died in Paris, he wanted to be remembered as the infamous St. Oscar of Oxford, Poet and Martyr" (Belford 336), indicating his marginal personality and protest against the aristocracy with his unique lifestyle. Therefore, Oscar Wilde should be remembered as one of the earliest figures in British literature and history in terms of revolting against the hegemonic gender understandings, wich can be verified through both his character designations and his personal choices.

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