DORIAN GRAY INTERVENTION NOTES

Summary

The story is set in London towards the end of the 19th century. Basil Hallward has painted a portrait of a handsome young man, Dorian Gray. Thrilled by the beauty of the painting, Dorian Gray wishes that he could always stay as young as his image in the picture. He gives up his soul to achieve this wish. Dorian sets out on a life of self-indulgence and evil. His behaviour seems to be reflected in the portrait and he realises that his wish has come true – the portrait is beginning to show a corrupted man while he remains unchanged physically. Frightened of what is happening, Dorian hides the picture in a locked room. The years pass and Dorian leads an increasingly depraved life, but the years have no effect on him; he looks as young and beautiful as ever. Then one evening he meets the artist once more and, after he has shown him the evil-looking portrait, Dorian kills him in a fit of hatred. Dorian tries to carry on with his immoral life but he is tormented by feelings of guilt and decides that the only way he can make up for what he has done is to destroy the painting. In the climax of the story Dorian tries to kill the man in the portrait, but kills himself in the process.

**Chapters 1–2**: Dorian Gray, a young and beautiful man has his portrait painted by his artist friend, Basil Hallward. The picture is so beautiful that the artist loves it as he also loves Dorian. Dorian also admires the way the portrait reflects his beauty but becomes frightened when his new-found friend, Lord Henry, tells him that his beauty will fade with age. Dorian makes a passionate wish that he would remain young and beautiful forever; he would give up his soul for this.

**Chapters 3–6**: Dorian falls in love with the actress Sibyl Vane because of her beauty and acting ability. When he takes his friends to a performance she acts very badly, which disturbs him so much that he breaks up with her,hurting her cruelly. After the break-up, Dorian notices that the picture has changed; it shows cruelty in the face, while his own face remains pure and innocent looking. He realises that he can live a corrupt life without his face showing the effects, while the picture will show ageing and the ugliness of his soul. Dorian decides to go back to Sibyl and ask her to marry him but Sibyl has already killed herself as a result of Dorian’s cruelty.

**Chapters 7–8**: Basil is shocked by Dorian’s apparent indifference to Sibyl’s death. He wants to see the picture but Dorian refuses and tells him the picture has changed and has a life of its own. Dorian also refuses to sit for Basil for another painting. They argue and Dorian says that Basil has taught him to love only his own beauty. Dorian decides to hide the picture away in the old schoolroom so that nobody would ever see it again and discover his secret.

**Chapters 9–11**: Many years pass with terrible changes to his soul because of his corrupt ways. He meets Basil in the street one night and invites him home. They argue about rumours Basil has heard of Dorian’s terrible life. Finally, Dorian shows Basil the picture, which Basil finds shocking. Suddenly, Dorian feels hatred for Basil and kills him. Later, Dorian forces Campbell, a scientist he knows, to destroy all traces of the body using chemicals.

**Chapters 12–13**: Dorian decides to become a good person. He discusses this with Lord Henry, who convinces him that people cannot change. Later Dorian becomes angry about the wish he once made and begins to fear for his soul. He decides he must start a new life and to do this he must destroy the picture. He stabs the picture and a terrible crash and scream are heard. The police arrive to find the dead body of an old and ugly man lying next to a portrait of the young and beautiful Dorian Gray.

**Chapter 14**

He writes a letter summoning Alan Campbell, and sends his servant to deliver it. Alan was a man of science, a chemist, but the two initially bonded over their shared love of music. Alan "was an extremely clever young man," but "whatever little sense of the beauty of poetry he possessed he had gained entirely from Dorian." For a while the two were inseparable, but for unspecified reasons Alan began leaving parties whenever Dorian showed up and refusing to speak with him or interact with him in any way. Alan withdrew from society almost entirely, immersing himself in his experiments. Dorian turns to blackmail, showing him a letter that he promises to send unless the scientist agrees to help. Alan succumbs to "the disgrace with which he was threatened," round seven in the evening, the deed is done. Basil's body has been incinerated, and Alan leaves with the words "Let us never see each other again.

**Chapters 15/16**

Later that evening, Dorian attends a party thrown by Lady Narborough, a wealthy widow and popular socialite. Henry can easily see that something is wrong, but when he tries to get Dorian to share his troubles, the younger man excuses himself, saying that he is "out of temper" and "must go home." Once home, Dorian faces the fact that Basil's belongings, which he had left in Dorian's closet, still have to be destroyed. He throws them into his fireplace, feeling sick at the smell of burning fabric and leather. He is then overcome by an unspecified "mad craving." He goes out, which is revealed to be an opium den. s he is leaving, one of the women calls him "Prince Charming," at which point an unrecognized sailor springs to his feet and pursues Dorian outside. The sailor grabs Dorian by the throat, brings him to his knees, and points a revolver in his face, telling him that he is the brother of Sibyl Vane, whom Dorian drove to suicide. Sibyl died 18 years ago, making her lover nearly 40, but the person standing before him looks no older than 20. Dorian pretends to have never heard of Sibyl Vane.

**Chapters 17 & 18**

The chapter begins with Dorian and Lord Henry chatting with Gladys, the Duchess of Monmouth, during a party at a conservatory. Dorian faints. Dorian, however, doesn't tell them the real reason for his distress: he fainted upon seeing the face of James Vane, spying on him through the conservatory window. Dorian and Lord Henry accompany Sir Geoffrey Clouston, the duchess's brother, on a short hunting excursion.A man is shot. Dorian frantically rides to the farm house where the body is being kept, and discovers that the dead man is **James Vane.**

**Chapter 19**

Several months later, Dorian is back in London, conversing with Lord Henry at the older man's house. Dorian, it seems, has decided to change his ways. Henry tells him that he is perfect the way he is and that there's no use trying to change, but Dorian replies that "I have done too many dreadful things in my life," and that "I began my good actions yesterday." His so-called "good action" was his treatment of Hetty, a beautiful young peasant girl who reminded him of Sibyl Vane. She fell in love with Dorian, but instead of taking advantage of her and breaking her heart, as was his usual way, he "determined to leave her as flower-like as [he] had found her." he conversation turns towards the whereabouts of Basil Hallward. The painter's disappearance, now six weeks old, is still the talk of the town, along with Henry's divorce and the suicide of Alan Campbell.

**Chapter 20**

During the walk home from Henry's, Dorian enjoys the warm evening. He is annoyed when several people mutter his name in astonishment as he passes, an occurence that used to please him, but he cheers himself by thinking of the beautiful and innocent Hetty, and his recent "good action." She had been hopelessly naive, but this was her charm, "she had everything that he had lost." He climbs to the attic, locks the door behind him, and throws the curtain from the picture. Dorian realizes that his kindness towards Hetty was either an act of vanity, driven by his desire to improve the appearance of his soul, or simply a different sort of selfishness, driven by "the desire for a new sensation." Desperate to escape his past crimes, Dorian sees the painting as the one piece of evidence revealing his guilt: "It had been like a conscience to him...He would destroy it." The knife on the table, he notices hey find the body of a "withered, wrinkled, and loathsome" man, lying on the floor with a knife in his chest. The servants only recognize their master from the rings on his fingers., is still stained with Basil's blood. He takes it, cleans it several times, and stabs the picture.

**Background and themes**

The Picture of Dorian Gray is often described as a melodrama – a work in which everything is larger than life.

It is more like a myth or a morality tale than the realistic novels which readers are accustomed to nowadays. It

contains so much dialogue that it is almost as if it is a written version of a stage play. This is not surprising as

Wilde went on to write a series of very successful plays in the three years following its publication, including his masterpiece The Importance of Being Earnest. Faust: The theme of The Picture of Dorian Gray is a

recurring one in European culture, most famously expounded in Faust. In the story of Faust, the devil tempts a man to sell his soul in exchange for all the things he desires. The result is disaster and the lesson is that a man’s soul is more valuable than anything he could possibly gain in the material world. In Oscar Wilde’s version, Lord Henry represents the devil figure and Dorian Gray is Faust.

**Morality:** The portrait symbolises Dorian’s soul or morality. Lord Henry tempts Dorian to indulge in an immoral lifestyle, carelessly disregarding the feelings of the people he seduces and then rejects. Dorian thinks that he can escape from the consequences of his immoral life because the portrait takes the blame for him. But he goes too far by killing his old friend Basil Hallward and then suffers from guilt. Wilde is showing us that nobody can escape the moral consequences of their actions.

**Undercurrent of sexuality**: To this familiar moral fable, Wilde adds the extra ingredient of sexual scandal.Although the novel never actually describes it, the reader is aware that there is an undercurrent of sexuality in many of the relationships. Apart from the story of Sibyl Vane, we do not know exactly what Dorian does that isso ‘immoral’, as in Victorian England it was impossible for a writer to be honest about sexual matters. In the end, good triumphs over evil when Dorian kills himself. This is the type of moral ending that was expected in 19th century literature.

**The Supremacy of Youth and Beauty**

It is a means of escaping the brutalities of the world: Dorian distances himself, not to mention his consciousness, from the horrors of his actions by devoting himself to the study of beautiful things—music, jewels, rare tapestries. In a society that prizes beauty so highly, youth and physical attractiveness become valuable commodities. Lord Henry reminds Dorian of as much upon their first meeting, when he laments that Dorian will soon enough lose his most precious attributes. For although beauty and youth remain of utmost importance at the end of the novel—the portrait is, after all, returned to its original form—the novel suggests that the price one must pay for them is exceedingly high. Indeed, Dorian gives nothing less than his soul.

**The Superficial Nature of Society**

It is no surprise that a society that prizes beauty above all else is a society founded on a love of surfaces. What matters most to Dorian, Lord Henry, and the polite company they keep is not whether a man is good at heart but rather whether he is handsome. As Dorian evolves into the realization of a type, the perfect blend of scholar and socialite, he experiences the freedom to abandon his morals without censure. Indeed, even though, as Basil warns, society’s elite question his name and reputation, Dorian is never ostracized. On the contrary, despite his “mode of life,” he remains at the heart of the London social scene because of the “innocence” and “purity of his face.” As Lady Narborough notes to Dorian, there is little (if any) distinction between ethics and appearance: “you are made to be good—you look so good.”

**The Negative Consequences of Influence**

**The painting and the yellow book** have a profound effect on Dorian, influencing him to predominantly immoral behavior over the course of nearly two decades. Reflecting on Dorian’s power over Basil and deciding that he would like to seduce Dorian in much the same way, Lord Henry points out that there is “something terribly enthralling in the exercise of influence.” Falling under the sway of such influence is, perhaps, unavoidable, but the novel ultimately censures the sacrifice of one’s self to another. Basil’s idolatry of Dorian leads to his murder, and **Dorian’s devotion to Lord Henry’s hedonism and the yellow book** quickens his own downfall. It is little wonder, in a novel that prizes individualism—the uncompromised expression of self—that the sacrifice of one’s self, whether it be to another person or to a work of art, leads to one’s destruction.

Symbols:

The Picture of Dorian Gray

The picture of Dorian Gray, “the most magical of mirrors,” shows Dorian the physical burdens of age and sin from which he has been spared. For a time, Dorian sets his conscience aside and lives his life according to a single goal: achieving pleasure. His painted image, however, asserts itself as his conscience and hounds him with the knowledge of his crimes: there he sees the cruelty he showed to Sibyl Vane and the blood he spilled killing Basil Hallward.

The Opium Dens

The opium dens, located in a remote and derelict section of London, represent the sordid state of Dorian’s mind. He flees to them at a crucial moment. After killing Basil, Dorian seeks to forget the awfulness of his crimes by losing consciousness in a drug-induced stupor. Although he has a canister of opium in his home, he leaves the safety of his neat and proper parlor to travel to the dark dens that reflect the degradation of his soul.

James Vane

James Vane is less a believable character than an embodiment of Dorian’s tortured conscience. As Sibyl’s brother, he is a rather flat caricature of the avenging relative. Still, Wilde saw him as essential to the story, adding his character during his revision of 1891. Appearing at the dock and later at Dorian’s country estate, James has an almost spectral quality. Like the ghost of Jacob Marley in Charles Dickens’s A Christmas Carol, who warns Scrooge of the sins he will have to face, James appears with his face “like a white handkerchief” to goad Dorian into accepting responsibility for the crimes he has committed.

**The Yellow Book**

Lord Henry gives Dorian a copy of the yellow book as a gift. Although he never gives the title, Wilde describes the book as a French novel that charts the outrageous experiences of its pleasure-seeking protagonist (we can fairly assume that the book in question is Joris-Karl Huysman’s decadent nineteenth-century novel À Rebours, translated as “Against the Grain” or “Against Nature”). The book becomes like holy scripture to Dorian, who buys nearly a dozen copies and bases his life and actions on it. The book represents the profound and damaging influence that art can have over an individual and serves as a warning to those who would surrender themselves so completely to such an influence.

CHARACTERS

Dorian Gray

Dorian and his beauty are at the heart of this story. Dorian is as young, pure, and stunningly beautiful when the novel opens as the image Basil Hallward paints of him. Unlike the rest of humanity, however, Dorian stays forever young, while Basil's painting of him ages and shows signs of each immoral act Dorian commits. Dorian may be beautiful, but he is shallow, self-centered, and selfdestructive. In Dorian, Wilde creates a complicated characterportrait. Wilde cared greatly for beauty and argued for it's needing no further justification. However, the portrait he paints of Dorian is actually quite repulsive. This man may be physically lovely, but he leaves a trail of broken hearts, ruined reputations, and dead bodies behind him. Dorian's name is important, but ambiguous. His last name, gray, suggests he is morally neither black nor white (or that he could be either black or white). His first name blends multiple possible meanings. Dorian follows the lifestyle of **New Hedonism**. This lifestyle advocates a complete abandon to your impulses, and does not believe in following social dictates or morals.He becomes impulsive, narcissistic(,a person who has an excessive interest in or admiration of themselves) and selfish. life devoted to following his impulses without tempering them with reason, a life of thinking only of his own selfish desires and disregarding the hurt caused to the people around him. The legacy begotten by new hedonism.

**Basil Hallward**

Basil is a mature man. He's an artist who is otherwise quite conventional. He is concerned with reputation and good character, but also with creating and capturing beauty. Wilde opens his preface with "The artist is the creator of beautiful things." That's somewhat the case

here: Basil does create a beautiful portrait of Dorian. But it is beautiful in part because Basil lets his worship of Dorian slip into the painting—and it doesn't remain beautiful. Only Dorian does. Does that mean Basil creates Dorian? It does, in part: he certainly facilitates Dorian's supernatural status. However, it is up to another character to bring Dorian fully into being: Henry Wotton.

Lord Henry Wotton

Lord Henry is, among other things, a critic. Where Basil paints but does not necessarily explain his art, Henry explains beauty, art, and life in a way that fundamentally changes Dorian. Basil may capture Dorian's beauty on canvas, but it is Henry who explains what it means in a way that awakens Dorian to its significance. Henry is also a cynic and a dandy. He lives with his life on display to the world, for pleasure, and, he claims, entirely by his own lights. About the three main characters in the novel, Oscar Wilde once wrote, "Basil Hallward is what I think I am: Lord Henry what the world thinks me: Dorian what I would like to be—in other ages, perhaps."

Sibyl Vane

Sibyl Vane's name is deeply symbolic. In ancient Greece sibyls were oracles at holy sites. The gods spoke through them. Sibyl Vane, however, is an actress, and the divinities who speakthrough her are human artists. She and Dorian are variations on the same idea; they are living art. Her last name has various meanings. She is very beautiful, and it would be appropriate for her to be vain, but she's not. Instead, sadly she lives in vain,dying young as a result of her naivety and her complex relationship with her art. Her blossoming love for Dorian moves her as the wind moves a weathervane, changing her view of life and thus her previously all-consuming dedication to her acting. Sibyl is young and poor. She pours herself wholly into her acting because she desperately needs to escape her reality, and acting allows her to imagine a good life for herself. Once Dorian loves her, her performances suffer. She says it is because she no longer needs acting to escape in this way. If that's the case readers might well wonder why Basil paints so very well.