

**THE PICTURE OF SOCIAL POWER: A STUDY OF THE INFECTIOUS
INFLUENCE OF IDEOLOGY IN *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY***

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

The Picture of Social Power: A Study of the Infectious Influence of Ideology and How Commodification Affects Power in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

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When *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was first published in 1890 in *Lippcott's Monthly Magazine*, the immediate reaction to Wilde's sensational, sensual story was controversial. Through his shocking storytelling, Wilde attacked the moralistic principles of Victorian society. In response, his work was deemed a scandal, contemporary critics reviewing the novel as being a "mawkish and nauseous story", and constantly hinting at "disgusting sins and abominable crimes" (Wilde, Appendix H). Following the trend of moral criticism, even modern scholars regard *The Picture of Dorian Gray* with an emphasis on studies of sexuality and a critical analysis of material decadence in the Victorian era. In my thesis, however, I focus on the struggle of power dynamics, influence, and objectification of people as essential themes throughout the novel.

This thesis focuses on an analysis of how power relations are constructed in society, and how commodification maintains control over people. The study examines the themes of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* concerning power through influence and manipulation, the process of identity formation, and the effects of commodification and control. In this paper, I analyze the impact of the rhetorical techniques in the spread of ideological beliefs reflected in

characters' relationships. I then discuss the process of identity formation and explore strategies of using ideological influence to objectify marginalized people in order to maintain power dynamics. Finally, I examine the concept of looking towards a process of identity reclamation. I intend to convey that the concerns of rhetorical influence and the commodification of people as objects on display in order to silence individual voice and maintain power are recurring themes reflected in Wilde's fin-de-siècle novel. In the context of historical power hierarchies and oppression, and a work of fiction written during an era of anxiety about the end of a century, I seek to provide an understanding of the implications of identity formation amidst the dynamics of a power struggle. I also examine the process of identity reclamation, questioning the means of effectively taking back one's identity.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to my father, who encouraged my passion for literature and research from the very beginning.

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INTRODUCTION

A history of criticism

When *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was first published in 1890 in *Lippcott's Monthly Magazine*, the immediate reaction to Wilde's sensational, sensual story was controversial: it was viewed with "some scandal" by Wilde's Victorian audience (Battersby 14). *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is set in Victorian England. The premise of the novel revolves around the portrait made by artist Basil Hallward of young Dorian Gray. After seeing the portrait and lamenting his own mortality, Dorian makes the exchange for his soul – wishing that he could change places with the portrait and keep his youthful beauty forever, in exchange for the portrait aging. When this exchange manifests, Dorian is able to act wickedly in society with no superficial consequences while the portrait transforms to reflect his disgraceful morality. Throughout the novel, Dorian is influenced by the aristocrat Lord Henry, who encourages a hedonistic lifestyle, as opposed to the ideal Victorian morality. As Dorian degenerates in his actions towards others, even resorting to murder to keep his secret, he eventually comes to the realization that the portrait is taking control of his sense of agency. He ultimately destroys the portrait to reclaim his sense of self, which results in Dorian's own self-destruction.

Contemporary critics of Wilde's novel were antagonistic towards the text, due to their interpretation of Wilde's critique on Victorian societal values. Through various analyses of his writing, Wilde was taken to have attacked the moralistic principles of Victorian society, and the extent of the critical interpretation by his audience was enough to reflect in a poor reception of his novel. His work was deemed a scandal. Critics reviewed the novel as a 'mawkish and

nauseous story’, constantly hinting at ‘disgusting sins and abominable crimes’, and possessing an ‘effeminate frivolity’ (Wilde, Appendix H 271-273). Following the publication and release of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, after a series of incidents, author Oscar Wilde was subsequently taken to trial for offenses of immorality and homosexuality. During his trial, Wilde was faced with incriminating evidence based solely on an analysis of his aforementioned novel. The novel itself was utilized as concrete evidence – the prosecution read excerpts of earlier versions of the novel, providing a “dramatic performance” of supposed love confessions among the male characters (Wilde 31). The trial ultimately concluded with Wilde’s condemnation, conviction, and imprisonment.

With the novel’s reputation as a work with strong sexual overtones, the development of literary criticism analyzing *The Picture of Dorian Gray* maintains a trend of exploring interpretations of the story pertaining to its critique of morality, of sexuality, and overall as an expression of Aesthetic principles. Most criticism of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* focuses on an emphasis on studies of sexuality and a critical analysis of the vice of material decadence reflected in the concerns of Victorian fin-de-siècle literature. This particular school of literary criticism studying *Dorian Gray* is in accordance with focusing on the influence of the Aesthetic Movement in Victorian England, as well as Wilde’s own involvement in the philosophic movement in society (Becker 660). Literary critics have focused on the moral resonance of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by interpreting the novel as an examination of Victorian purity, corruption of the soul, and the question of immoral or moral sexuality.

However, in divergence with the trend of most analyses of Wilde studies, in her literary critique of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Ellen Scheible discusses an underlying imperialistic theme written within Wilde's novel. During the years when Oscar Wilde wrote his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, colonial activity from Britain was thriving globally. Imperial pride was alive in the streets of London as the nation celebrated Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, fifty years of being on the throne. A journalist from a contemporary newsprint expresses the swell of national pride, exclaiming, "You begin to understand, as never before, what the Empire amounts to. We send out a boy here and boy there, and the boy takes hold of the savages, and teaches them to march about and shoot, and believe in him, and die for him and the Queen" (Longford 691). The vast expanse of the colonial territory of Great Britain was enough to suggest that the British imperial power was globally dominating. However, Scheible interprets a darker representation of imperial power in Wilde's work. She suggests that the novel portrays "the downfall of British imperialism" in the instance "if art were entirely to fall victim to excess and degeneracy" (Scheible 131). Among a plethora of analyses on the novel based on moral principles alone, Scheible's text prompts the question of how to position *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in the discourse of colonial and psychological criticism.

Although Wilde himself declared that he believed in art for art's sake, rather than art with any type of political message, through his active involvement in the Aesthetic movement, his own background suggests an influence from the dynamics of colonial power. Wilde was an Irish author – an Irishman living in Britain at a time following conflict between a socially subjugated nation of Ireland and the ruling British power. Wilde's experience as an Irish author immersed in British culture produced a reflection of the influence of colonial power ideology and societal

hierarchical relations within his writing and perspective of his own stories (Coakley 212). Living as an Other in society, both as homosexual and as Irish, Wilde's imagined position in the social hierarchy has undeniable, perhaps unconscious, effects on his writing and his own personal beliefs.

The use of rhetorical influence to maintain power dynamics is just one particular type of manipulation that is reflected in the spread of ideology depicted in the character relations within *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Thus, considering Wilde's background as a minority in a dominant Anglo-heterosexual society and the language of the primary text itself, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* becomes a curious point of study from a post-colonial perspective. Within this thesis, I propose that the novel can serve as a critical source for studying the ideas of power dynamics in society in the Victorian era, and I extend the analysis to modern societal issues occurring today through the lasting effects of historical manipulative ideology. In my thesis, I focus on the struggle of power dynamics, influence, and objectification of people as essential themes throughout the novel.

A history of power

Post-colonial studies is composed of scholarly explorations of the remaining legacy and implications of colonial exploitation and spread of power. Post-colonial scholars analyze the concept of power relations between the colonizer and those colonized and imperial desire for control within the colonial culture (Spivak 30, 141). The power dynamics analyzed within the post-colonial/imperial discourse focuses on the experience of the 'Other', the marginalized figure within a dominant society. In exploring the experience of the marginalized group, philosopher

Franz Fanon theorized that alienation, dehumanization, and violence occur resulting from the domination of the colonial power (Perinbam 15). Dorian Gray's alienation, caused by Lord Henry's moral corruption of and ideological influence on him, aligns with the post-colonial theories of a dominant oppressor dehumanizing a marginalized subject for their own purposes. A critical analysis of the ideology and effect of influence in Wilde's writing suggests an alignment with colonial rhetoric.

Along with rhetoric and ideology, the colonial critique of displaying exhibitions of colonized groups aligns with analyses of the commodification present in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Sadiyah Qureshi chronicles the history of people becoming displayed objects by a dominating imperial force, as a means to dehumanize and assert power over what were considered inferior groups to the colonizer (Qureshi 164). To further understand the experience of the 'Other', as a marginalized and dehumanized figure, Edward Said examines the construction of identity and culture against the influence of colonialism. He theorizes the effect of disillusionment with colonial ideology, and the importance of a socially-conscious awareness of colonial influence (Said 36). In this paper, I examine the processes and implications of the power dynamics in terms of the figure of the 'Other' in society and the effects of the influence of ideology as portrayed in Oscar Wilde's novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

The following thesis suggests that the spread of ideas and rhetorical strategies was utilized to justify exploitation, as Lord Henry utilized rhetorical influences in his communication with Dorian Gray in order to spread his own ideological beliefs. Along with the rhetorical influence of colonialism, I am also suggesting that Wilde's novel touches on the implications of colonial

power, mainly on the process of identity formation of those exploited by the majority group, creating the idea of an “Other” through commodification contrasted with the colonizers, and the silencing of the oppressed groups. Thus, the following analysis of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* explores a rich source of literature reflecting the framework of social relations that strengthen studies regarding the psychology of social control.

Looking at *The Picture of Dorian Gray* through a psychological lens in terms of power dynamics, rather than strictly a lens of gender and sexuality studies, opens the door for a different perspective on social psychology, the process of identity formation, as well as an examination of power and control through manipulation. The legacy of the power dynamics of rhetorical influence in strategies of colonialism continues today, as seen through racial tensions and the ongoing process of decolonizing and constructing identities in groups that were once colonized. People continue to be seen as objects, rather than individual selves in a struggle for power by the majority.

As discussed in Adam D. Galinsky, Derek D. Rucker, and Joe C. Magee’s psychological study on the concept of power, “the experience of power is associated with how people mentally represent their world” (Galinsky 429). In this case, with the lasting effect of objectification of marginalized people in power dynamics, it can be inferred that through manipulation and control, majority groups continue to envision commodification as justified in maintaining a power status. Using Wilde’s writing to explore the concept of objectification and power relations opens new perspectives of social psychology and the occurrence of techniques of rhetorical manipulation in society as reflected in Victorian literature. His own perspective as a marginalized member of his

society (both in his Irish background and his sexuality) provides insight to the analysis of social psychology theories of achieving oppressive control over others in society.

In this paper, I focus on analyzing how power relations are constructed in society, and how commodification maintains control over people. The thesis will examine the themes of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* concerning power through influence and manipulation, the process of identity formation, and the effects of commodification and control. My research will critically assess the historical background and context of Oscar Wilde's influence on the topics of identity and control. I then focus on the impact of the rhetorical techniques used by Lord Henry Wotton on Dorian Gray for the purpose of spreading and observing the effects of a particular ideology. The paper follows with an analysis of identity formation and an exploration of the strategy of the dehumanization of people in order to maintain power dynamics. Finally, the paper explores the concept of looking towards an effective process of reclaiming one's identity formation through an analysis of the concluding scene of the novel.

CHAPTER I

AN INFECTIOUS INFLUENCE

The rhetoric of Lord Henry

One key relationship that demonstrates the power dynamics in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is that between Lord Henry and Dorian Gray. In the novel, Dorian first meets Lord Henry while visiting their mutual friend Basil Hallward. During their initial meeting, Dorian becomes overwhelmed by Lord Henry's very presence. While listening to Lord Henry's monologue on his philosophy of temptations, Dorian is "dimly conscious that entirely fresh influences were at work within him" (Wilde 59). As Lord Henry continues speaking, Dorian feels the essence of Lord Henry's influence within his very self – he felt that a "secret chord" had been touched and he was "vibrating and throbbing to curious pulses" (59). The essence of Lord Henry moved Dorian Gray, as if "awakened from some dream" (64), and this charismatic influence made Dorian susceptible to ideological manipulation.

Lord Henry in turn "felt that the eyes of Dorian Gray were fixed on him" and "wished to fascinate" (81) Dorian. This position of overwhelming influence over Dorian leads to an exploitative position as Lord Henry realizes the thrill of power. Lord Henry acknowledges the "terribly enthralling" sensation "in the exercise of influence" (75), and with this awareness, he now seeks "to dominate [Dorian] – had already, indeed, half done so" (76). Lord Henry exploits Dorian's dependence on his influence with his desire to "make that wonderful spirit [of Dorian] his own" (76).

In order to understand the methods of social control present in Wilde's novel, it is critical to first understand the rhetoric spread throughout the novel. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is laced with instances of idolatry and a resulting infectious influence spread amongst characters, and this influence serves as a means of power and control over others, in Wilde's imagined society. The influential ideology throughout the novel is comprised of a hedonistic and dehumanizing rhetoric – which ultimately creates a non-human, a 'less-than', self-perception of those affected. The perception of particular individuals as subhuman drives the characters subsequent decisions and actions toward one another, particularly shown in Dorian Gray's own self-perception, sense of agency, and his actions towards others.

In our current day, the Victorian era is most associated with ideas of Victorian morality and cultural values. When one reads novels, or watches movies based on the Victorian era, one often thinks of Victorian morals as an influential component in society. The moral climate of the Victorian era is one of strict standards, prudence, and the importance of the upper, elite class in control of society. However, even with the moral climate in place, unrest from the people developed in response to such strict standards in society, as well as to the hypocrisy of the elite class of not adhering to the understood morality.

Many movements stemmed from the unrest of Victorian culture, most notably the response from literary figures. One particular movement that Oscar Wilde was involved in was the Aesthetic Movement. The Aesthetic Movement focused on the value of art for art's sake, the visual and pleasurable effect of art, rather than any socio-political themes. Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a story which embodies the very ideas of the views on art and morality found

within the creed of Aestheticism. The doctrine of a focus on decadence in one's life and valuing artistic experimentation over traditional standards of morality is embodied in Wilde's creation of the hedonistic character Lord Henry, and in particular found in Lord Henry's rhetoric throughout the novel.

In Wilde's writing however, the views of Aestheticism seem to go towards an extreme end – one in which Lord Henry uses the rhetoric of art for art's sake to mean exploitation of individual agency for the pursuit of pleasure in life. Wilde's version of Aesthetic rhetoric in his novel seems to criticize the power of an aesthetic philosophy, in which the influence of pursuing beauty in life can lead to a dismissal of human agency for the ultimate cause. The extreme style of aestheticism that Lord Henry advocates and manipulates is the oppressive force that subjugates Dorian Gray's agency, and thus his power in society within the novel. This trend of aesthetic rhetoric is similar to the subjugation resulting from colonial rhetoric, all done in the pursuit of imperial desire.

A philosophy of pleasure

Lord Henry is first introduced as an aristocratic lord, set in a scene of luxury. He speaks languidly, providing a speech declaring that “beauty, real beauty ends where an intellectual expression begins,” focusing on the importance of Dorian being a “brainless, beautiful creature,” (Wilde 45) and insisting that beauty and an intellectual mind cannot exist within the same entity. The rhetoric of Lord Henry begins with an absolutist philosophical statement promoting idolatry of visual beauty without intellectual strength, and continues in the novel to showcase statements of idolatry and a hedonistic nature.

In contrast to the Victorian moral climate, Lord Henry advocates hedonistic values in his talks with Dorian Gray. When speaking with Dorian as he is painted by Basil, Lord Henry proclaims that “the aim of life is self-development. To realize one’s nature perfectly” (Wilde 58). However, rather than conforming to that nature being one of sound, Victorian morals, Lord Henry insists that it is the Hellenic ideal that one must strive for. Rather than being “afraid of himself” and succumbing to “self-denial” of Victorian society, Lord Henry insists that it is through sin that our bodies are purified. He argues that our stifled impulses stay in our mind and that is what “poisons” us (59), and rather once the body acts on those impulses, it has “done with its sin, for action is a mode of purification” (59). Lord Henry murmurs to Dorian Gray that “nothing can cure the soul but the senses” (61) – a conclusion to his hedonistic rhetoric, in stark contrast to the ideals of Victorian morality.

A study of idolatry

In addition to his rhetoric of debauchery, Lord Henry also advocates idolatry of beauty. Lord Henry talks at length to Dorian Gray about the importance of youth and beauty, and the lasting effect of essentially being an idol in society. He argues to Dorian that “youth is the one thing worth having” and suggests to Dorian that he is the “visible symbol” of a new Hedonism of the century (62, 63). Dorian Gray is viewed as the symbol of a cultural ideal to focus on one’s own pleasure, engaging in sin for purification, rather than adhering to the Victorian moral climate. Lord Henry’s high praise of Dorian Gray’s beauty and effect in society suggests a mentality of idolatry, applauding Dorian for his objective beauty rather than for the character that his own mind has to offer for society. Lord Henry preached “there is nothing in the world but youth” and

without a youthful beauty “there are no triumphs left” (63), subtly suggesting a warning to Dorian to be appreciative of his beauty while he still can.

The idolatry of Dorian is laced with a rhetoric of objective study. Lord Henry comments on the objective nature of science, stating that “the advantage of Science is that it is not emotional” (79). He begins to regard his fascination with Dorian’s divine character as an analytic study – removing any human connection to his relationship with Dorian in order to study him. Lord Henry considered Dorian as “his own creation” (96), a “subject made to his hand” (97) rather than as an authentic person. The objective, scientific rhetoric portrays Dorian as a controlled, ‘Other’ being, placed on display detached from society.

The influence of rhetoric and the spread of ideological disease in society

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde provides a strong account of the power of manipulation and social control through the infectious spread of ideology. The influence of ideology as a means of social control is present in many instances in history – through colonial rhetoric of the empire as “saviors” of the savage peoples, in the Nazi campaign of advocating for white supremacy, and through particular rhetoric found amongst cult members who uncritically submit to any given authority’s influence. In these historical instances of ideology influencing the mindset of society, the expressions of language and thought have become a sort of contagion. Belief in the power over others and oppressive societal hierarchies becomes established in particular ideologies that are spread as contagious thoughts among the people in society. Through the contagious spread of thoughts becoming viewed as a sense of reality, a single group

of people come to believe an ideology and thus further spread to others in society the ideas of manipulation of others, and of a sense of authority in the oppressive class.

However, while a contagious thought in circumstances of an imbalance of power and agency can be a harmful condition for the minority in the hierarchy, it is not always the case that contagious thought is fundamentally a bad act. The resulting effect in society from the authoritative group using manipulative ideology and a spread of infectious ideas as a means of control of the minority people stems from the particular kind of ideology being spread infectiously among the people. While a positive ideology promoting a sense of harmony would possibly promote a sense of harmonic influence in society, the insidious influence towards demoralizing behavior, attitudes, and a negative concept of one's self-perception contribute to a darker sense of the effect of ideology on social control.

The phenomena of the spread of ideas throughout society is not an unfamiliar concept to scholarly study. In literary studies, the idea of affective literature was explored following an epidemic of people across Europe committing suicide after reading Johann von Goethe's novel "The Sorrows of Young Werther," in which the protagonist of the story commits suicide (Gray 48-55). The rhetoric of suicidal ideation in the novel was transmitted through society – readers of the story were influenced by the attitude of the writing, the words affected how the people reacted and responded to the ideology (Phillips 340).

Historically it becomes clear to observe the influential spread of ideology as infectious in society. Just as in the contagious rhetoric of fiction, beliefs can spread through rhetoric of

ideology in a real world context. One particular example is the rhetoric of colonial powers, such as England, in putting colonized peoples on display as dehumanized spectacles. There were two rhetorical strategies utilized in dehumanizing colonized people. One way was to highlight the difference in the civilized nature of the cultures. In the later 1890s, an exhibit was produced at the Earl's Court in London that was titled 'Savage South Africa.' In this exhibition, African performers reenacted scenes from wars occurring in their native land. However, the performances were not just entertainment, as the displayed peoples "were always part of broader and ongoing discussions regarding their nature" (Qureshi 124). With the front of being a 'savage' exhibit, this reinforced audience expectation that the contents of the performance would include ritualistic song and dance demonstrations – customs of a culture "deemed specific to developmental stages beneath civilized, commercial, and Christian life" (Qureshi 124). The song and dance customs emphasized by the exhibits reinforced the rhetoric that there was a distinction between the colonial London and the colonized African nations. This distinction was shown as a debate on the lack of a civilized nature in native colonized people.

The second way in which displayed colonized people reinforced the rhetoric of colonial power was through the spectacle of savage sexuality. In 1810, South African East Cape native Sarah Baartman was brought to England through a domestic service deal with her Cape Town employer and an English surgeon. While in England, Baartman was exhibited in London Piccadilly Circus and became a celebrity on stage. Known as "Hottentot Venus," Baartman was advertised as having "the kind of shape which is most admired among her countrymen" (Strother 25) and was famous due to the fascination that England had with her strikingly fuller figure that was in contrast with English women. Baartman's body was put on display for the colonial

English people – while she was not nude, she wore a light costume, designed to accentuate her figure as if she were bare (Qureshi 121). This dehumanization of highlighting her body and dismissing the individual identity of Sara Baartman emphasized her biological difference. Her body became a sexual fascination in English society, and this display of sexualization enforced the idea that she was from a culture that was savage, in need of saving by the superior English people. This propaganda and visual display of marginalized people further distinguished an inferior position of the marginalized groups in society. As exhibitions of Baartman were seen around the nation in a travelling show, the propaganda of objectification was spread throughout society and this display enabled the continued support of the normalized culture of the colonizers. Similarly, the display of characters as objects rather than people in Wilde's writing emphasized the development of social control based on the dehumanization of others. While the experience of the exploitation of Africans within a colonial context is different from the experience of exploitation that Dorian Gray within Victorian England, the techniques of objectification and domination are reflected in both dynamics of power relations.

The effect of rhetoric in society and the ensuing spread of ideology in society is examined in social contagion theory. Social contagion theory rests on the argument that through a variety of factors, ideas are spread through communication and contact with others (Lindzey). Ideas are spread through contact with ideology and the influence of one's network and contact with those spreading the ideological beliefs. A mind is, metaphorically, infected with a virus of ideology in contact with the rhetoric pushed by those in control. The ideological beliefs are then transmitted to others as people communicate and transmit the beliefs to one another.

One sub-study of contagious social thought is explored through the contemporary study of memetics, a theory in which ideas are viewed as active agents, capable of distribution across human minds. Richard Dawkins coined the term ‘memetics’ to refer to the study of how cultural thought and ideas are spread throughout society. In addition to studying how thought is able to spread in society, memetics also explores how the ideas are able to influence behavior and conjure particular emotions. In Dawkins’s theory, contagious ideas behave more like evolutionary agents than an infection. He reasons that in order for ideas to spread in society, they must have a variety of advantageous factors that support the influence of an idea. These factors include learnability (if those transmitting the idea are able to understand the thought), ease of communication, tendency to be transmitted (or, frequency of exposure to the thought), conformity pressure, and collective fitness (or, how the idea contributes to the good or overall well-being of a society). With all of these factors considered, it is argued in memetics that it can be determined how infectious a transmitted idea will be in society.

In the *Handbook of Social Psychology*, social contagion is expressed as “the spread of affect or behaviour from one crowd participant to another” (Lindzey 605). In this theory, it posits that “one person serves as the stimulus for the imitative actions of another.” Memetics explains an evolutionary construct of the spread of influence – suggesting that ideas are able to spread through an advantageous combination of factors that strengthen their effect. In addition to an evolutionary perspective of contagion, the spread of ideological thought by means of rhetorical communication is seen as spreading infectiously through the transmission of contact with the idea. The contemporary evolutionary memetic theory and a perspective of a metaphor of thought

as a virus build on each other to strengthen the concept of social thought as contagious among agents of society.

This contemporary theory has resonance with the late-nineteenth century concepts of social contagion. For example, in 1894 social scientist James M. Baldwin theorized the spread of habits through contagious imitation of other. Baldwin argues that starting when we are young, people copy others in order to understand the world, and through those imitations and repetitive ideas transmitted from others, people build their world schema. Baldwin argues that in building one's character based on copied notions and habits from others constructs a sense of morality and social belief that is in tune with the attitudes transmitted from others. In this way, by repeating ideas and shaping imitated actions to match with one's character, people are influenced with a transmission of ideas from others (Baldwin 37). Just as words affect those who come into contact with them, and how political rhetoric is spread infectiously in society, Wilde demonstrates the spread of ideology through the spread of beliefs in the construction of society reflected in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

The spread of ideology in The Picture of Dorian Gray

The concept of influence shows up ubiquitously throughout Wilde's novel. The influence of ideological philosophy spreads from Lord Henry to Dorian, the influence of art is prevalent in Dorian's response to Sybil Vane's theatrical performances, and the influence of the very essence of a person transmitting to others repeats constantly during the story of Dorian Gray's transformation.

In the very beginning of the novel, the essence of a person is discussed as influential – as artist Basil Hallward is talking with Lord Henry about his encounters with Dorian Gray, Basil declares that “some subtle influence passed from” Dorian to himself, that Dorian was essentially “a suggestion” influencing Basil to see “the wonder” in the world that he had never been able to before (Wilde 52). The idolatrous proclamation from Basil depicts Dorian as a sort of societal virus – transmitting the wonder of the world to Basil. Later in his conversation with Lord Henry, Basil exclaims that Lord Henry is also a sort of societal virus. When Lord Henry expresses that he wants to meet Dorian Gray, Basil states that Dorian has “a simple and beautiful nature” and that Lord Henry would “spoil him” – he implores Lord Henry not to “try to influence him”, explaining that his “influence would be bad” (55). In contrast to Dorian Gray’s infectious influence as a positive for Basil’s sense of engagement in the wonders of the world, Lord Henry’s essence is constructed as a sick, fatal disease – infecting and spoiling the wondrous effect of Dorian’s influence.

The spread of the ideological philosophical thought from Lord Henry begins with Dorian Gray during their first meeting. As Lord Henry shares his aesthetic philosophy of a pleasurable life with Dorian, Dorian feels a sense of bewilderment by his thoughts. He becomes aware of “entirely fresh influences [that] were at work within him”, he felt “vibrating and throbbing to curious pulses” (59) by the influential ideology – a spread similar to a spread of disease, working within people following a contact of transmission.

Following the initial contact with Lord Henry’s influence, Dorian is indoctrinated with the ideology of pleasure. He begins to act as an agent of influence himself, repeating and

transmitting to others the philosophy he first received from Lord Henry. While speaking with Lord Henry's wife, Dorian repeats a particular belief of Henry's, to which Lady Henry responds by stating, "Ah! that is one of Harry's views, isn't it, Mr. Gray? I always hear Harry's views from his friends" (85). Her response fortifies the suggestion that Lord Henry acts as an active agent of influence in transmitting his ideological beliefs to others in society.

When Basil confronts Dorian Gray about his changed behavior, Dorian's own infectious societal influence to others is established. Basil laments the fact that people speak of Dorian as "something vile and degraded" (181), as carrying the infection of actively living Lord Henry's hedonistic ideology has altered Dorian's pure essence. It is suggested by Basil that Dorian's behavior and philosophical approach to life serves to infect others with a societal disease, or sense of degradation, as his affiliation becomes "so fatal to young men" (182). Basil argues that "one has a right to judge of a man by the effect he has over his friends" and that Dorian's affiliations in society "seem to lose all sense of honour, of goodness, or purity. [Dorian has] filled them with a madness for pleasure" (183). Dorian's influence has "led them there", to an infection of the pursuit for pleasure, and the disease of scandal in society. The spread of ideology from Lord Henry to Dorian's mind, and then from Dorian's mind to his actions in society, serves to demonstrate the concept of social contagion theory concerning how ideology is spread infectious amongst agents in society.

CHAPTER II

THE POWER OVER THE COMMODITY

Throughout the novel, Lord Henry manipulates Dorian's sense of self in order to subjugate his identity and control his agency. Lord Henry is fascinated by the study of Dorian, and seeks "to dominate him" and to "make that wonderful spirit his own" (Wilde 76). Dorian in turn was captivated, "sat like one under a spell" (81) as Lord Henry discussed his ideology to listening ears. The rhetoric and spread of ideology in Wilde's writing contributed to the dynamics of power relations concerning Lord Henry's domination over Dorian's agency as portrayed in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* through means of manipulation and dehumanization. Lord Henry's hedonistic emphasis on pleasure and aesthetics on the expense of others constructed the ideology that was spread to maintain power relations in society. By using rhetoric, those in the upper hand of the power dynamics were able to dehumanize others based on aesthetic perceptions and manipulate their sense of identity in order to maintain that authority.

This ideology of objectifying rhetoric leads to a sub-human perception of an individual, both reflected in their societal perception as well as their self-perception. Dehumanized people become transformed in society and are viewed as how those in power define them, as if the rhetoric transmits a disease of other-ness to their very being. This also leads to a lack of one's agency in society, because if a person is not perceived as a rightful human, others will not consider their agency as valid. Consequently, it becomes easy for those in power to manipulate and control what happens in society to the marginalized sub-human group. Historically, the phenomena of manipulation through dehumanization can be found in periods during which a

group in power attempts to conquer and maintain authority over a minority group. The subjection of others is easier accomplished when the ethics of humanity is removed from people considered as subhuman.

Just as the display of Africans for entertainment in British colonial shows enforced dehumanizing perceptions, in colonial North America the European colonists constructed a distinct difference between their own culture and that of the 'savage' Native American people in order to produce a dehumanized perception in society. Historical documents recording colonial rhetoric demonstrate the rhetoric of savagery utilized against the native people. In a statement from the Virginia colony promoter Sir William Herbert in 1610, the idea of the distinction between the two cultures is suggested in his writing that "colonies degenerate assuredly when the colonists imitate and embrace the habits, customs, and practices of the natives." In the pursuit of conquest, the rhetorical strategy of constructing the concept of the savage Native American contributed to the dominance of European colonies over Native subjugation. After building the Native people as subhuman to the European class, it was essential to take that construction and manipulate the Native sense of self-identity in society.

In order to manipulate the sense of self constructed by Native people subjected to colonialism, colonizing nations engaged in colonial education. The process of colonial education meant that the Native American people were exposed to a "reculturing and reeducation" of their own identity. The agenda of colonial education had four essential tenets of their curriculum – to teach to Native people that they are inherently a "savage" people and "need to be civilized", that "civilization required subordination of Native communities", and that the "Native people had

mental, moral, physical, or cultural deficiencies” which made European instruction necessary for their progress from savagery (Lomawaima 2). The beliefs that guided colonial education were based on the goals of dominance by European colonies – by the need for power and authority to prosper from the majority group in society.

The colonial rhetoric of the savage nature of the Native Americans served as a technique to construct a dehumanized view of the indigenous people in order to ultimately control them. The construction of the savage people as subhuman strengthened the power hierarchy in that the European settlers were viewed as justified in seizing the land and subjugating the people already there – of course, for the sake of just purposes in spreading civilization to the wild people of America. Taking that dehumanization one step forward, the colonial education of the Native people served to uphold a subhuman manipulation and maintain the power dynamic of the colonial hierarchy. With the Natives subjected to a dehumanizing rhetoric, the people were subjugated to manipulation in their psychological process of identity formation. The influence of building their own self-identity as savage and viewing their role in society as a less than human being in need of civilized culture stands as a guiding force to maintaining the power of the elite group that controls the rhetoric.

The historical effects of colonial rhetoric subjecting Native Americans to savagery is lasting to present day constructions of the people. Fighting for land rights and agency in their tribal policies are ongoing today, as the legitimacy of their civility is deep rooted in the history of colonial rhetoric. This strategy of manipulation through dehumanization is effectively utilized by groups in power in hierarchal society over those in minority groups. This particular strategy of

dehumanization is seen throughout the power relations between people in the society of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

While there is no subjugation of an entire group of people, Lord Henry's rhetoric of dehumanization to Dorian serves to maintain his subjugation and conquest of Dorian Gray's agency and self-perception. Lord Henry's hedonistic rhetoric enters into Dorian's sense of self-perception, ultimately influencing his actions and perspectives on society. In influencing Dorian Gray's formation of his own particular identity, Lord Henry's rhetoric makes Dorian become a dehumanized being, susceptible to losing his own agency and transforming based on the values and lifestyle deemed acceptable by Lord Henry's viewpoint. Dorian Gray then in turn dehumanizes other characters in the novel, spreading the ideology of the notion that a hedonistic, aesthetic way of living is the ultimate import in life. In order to understand more fully how the process of dehumanization is capable of manipulating a person's sense of self and ultimately affect the question of agency and control, it is imperative to understand the psychological process of identity formation.

The process of identity formation

In the field of social psychology, the process of identity formation is articulated through theories of the self. The two central theories within psychological study are the identity theory and the social identity theory. The two theories are distinct in how they present the process of identity formation, and in studying the arguments together, one can construct a richer understanding of the process of developing a sense of self.

The focus in the psychology of identity theory is primarily on a recognition of roles within a societal structure. In identity theory, the components of roles within a society are imperative to understand in order to process one's own sense of personhood. The "core of an identity is the categorization of the self as an occupation of a role", and through recognition of a role, the sense of identity develops through performance through the expectations and meaning of that role within society. The individual views their self as different from other designated roles and therefore must use the established meaning of their role to guide their behaviors and interests in society.

Social identity theory was developed by psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s. This theory on the process of identity formation relies on social categorization and recognition within a group identification. Tajfel argued that a person's sense of self can be developed through how they view themselves in relation to various groups in society. In contrast to the idea of merely categorizing one's identity through a particular role occupation in society and viewing all other individuals as counter to that one role, in social identity theory the construction of self-image is made possible through group membership. Furthermore, when a person identifies the group they belong with – a classification of the in-group – they also begin to identify excluded groups in their construction of society. The differences between the in- and out-groups is what fortifies the sense of self that a person establishes through their social identity.

The process of identity formation in both psychological theories is through an understanding of the self as reflexive in society. Both theories argue the importance of a structure in society. The

self is either developed in a process of understanding and recognizing an individual role occupation in the structure, or through an acknowledgement of identification and affiliation with an in-group and distinct from other groups. Seeing how an individual fits within the framework of society constructs a sense of identity, how one perceives their worldview and agency within that structure.

Manipulation within identity formation

Dehumanization as a means of subjugation and control is present throughout the rhetoric of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. This method of authoritarian control is effective in its manipulative influence on the process of identity formation. Essentially, dehumanization is the psychological process in which a person, or a particular group of people, are viewed as a being less than human, and therefore not deserving of “moral consideration” (Opotow 347). The idea of dehumanization is that an identity will be considered as outside the scope of morality, outside of humanity. Dehumanizing rhetoric is perpetuated in society by the elite group, the societal class that is in power. The rhetoric of a ‘savage’, an objectified, influences how people are viewed by others in society. The identified and recognized role that a person had once occupied develops into one that has humanity removed. As an objectified, non-human view of the people spreads within society, the individual loses their sense of identity.

Without the humanity of a recognized role occupation or affiliation with an identified human group in society, it becomes acceptable for a group of people or an individual to be persecuted by others. The removal of the recognition of a legitimate role occupied in society, an individual loses a sense of agency within their environment. They become susceptible to manipulation by

the higher authority, and it becomes easier for a dehumanized subject to be controlled as their morality and basic human rights are lacking in their status.

Control against a dehumanized subject becomes rationalized through the idea that the group/individual does not have a sense of humanity in the basic sense, and therefore the authoritarian power is not violating any notion of morality by controlling the lives of a being that does not have moral rights or agency. Rhetoric that emphasizes the dehumanization of a person removes an affiliation with their role in the social hierarchy, ultimately eradicating a sense of individual agency, and providing an authority class the justification to control a dehumanized subject in society without any moral consequences.

Dehumanization of the other through commodification

Through the means of a dehumanizing rhetoric, and the influence of ideology spread through society, people are capable of maintaining a powerful domination of others in the minority group. If the upper class group subscribes to the rhetoric of a dehumanized sense of the 'other', then the person not a part of the elite assembly becomes essentially less than human – the minority becomes objectified as savage, and thus capable of being controlled in society. In Wilde's writing, the dehumanization of people functions when characters treat other people as objects on display, as mere artful imitations of real life. The objectified quality of the characters in the novel suggests the idea that they are viewed as not truly people, the human agency of the individual is taken away. In the world created by Wilde, the dehumanized characters are also viewed as objects existing solely for the pleasures and control of the elite, dominant group.

The dehumanization of Sybil Vane

For example, in the novel, the character of the actress Sybil Vane is commodified by Dorian Gray as a shell of all of the roles that she plays during Shakespearean theatre productions. The objectification of Sybil Vane allows for Dorian to not reflect on his own actions toward her, and through a dehumanization of Sybil Vane, Dorian treats her as an object just for his control. When she does not follow his control, Dorian does not view her as a person, and simply throws her away without consideration of consequence.

When Dorian Gray meets Sybil Vane, he recalls to Lord Henry that Sybil was “the loveliest thing” Dorian had “ever seen” in his life (Wilde 89). Lord Henry’s own philosophy of idolatry of others, objectifying one’s beauty, one’s appearance as a means of authentic emotion and the only value in life is reflected through Dorian’s descriptions of the actress. Through her performances, Dorian claims to have “seen her in every age and every costume” and through her theatrical skill, Dorian has come to love her, saying she is “everything in life” (90). Sybil Vane is declared “sacred” (91) by Dorian Gray, as he views her as an objectified idol on the stage, rather than another authentic person. He goes so far as to even declare that he “worships her” (93).

In his conversation with Lord Henry, Dorian Gray denies Sybil her very personhood. Lord Henry asks Dorian, “When is she Sibyl Vane?” to which Dorian replies “Never” (93). The denial of Sybil’s own autonomy and identity results from the ideology of idolatry and is an initial plunge into the culture of debauchery and objective distance from others as advocated through Lord Henry’s rhetorical influence. Although Dorian Gray announces that Sybil fundamentally lacks an identity in life outside of her function as a theatrical display, with Dorian’s statement that she

“knows nothing of life” (92), Wilde provides his readers with a glimpse into Sybil’s life outside of the theatre. Wilde gives Sybil a background, a family, thoughts and fears, he suggests through her own perspective that “she knew so much more of life” (104). The shifting narrative into Sybil’s perspective reveals that Dorian has in effect skewed his view and portrayal of Sybil as a hollow form of a person, objectified on display as just the characters she depicts on stage.

Dorian, accompanied by Basil and Lord Henry, goes to see Sybil perform as Juliet, praising that her performance will bring about “a new ideal of life” for her audience, as she “will represent” something unknown and “so much more real than life” (116). The dehumanization of Sybil continues as Dorian describes his fanaticism with her. Dorian proclaims that Sybil is “divine beyond all living things” and that her performance will be able to “spiritualize” the common class in the audience. He proclaims that he has given “everything that is good” (118-119) in him over to his objectified version of the idol of Sybil Vane. However, in this pivotal moment, Dorian Gray is forced to face reality when the dehumanized Sybil Vane acts truly human in her performance. Although she is described as appearing like “a creature from a finer world,” (119) Sybil’s performance on stage shattered Dorian Gray’s view of her as an objectified performer existing for the sake of art and not life.

The performance that Dorian once worshipped became “absurdly artificial”, “absolutely false” and “simply bad art” (121). Dorian’s voice alters to a bitter tone, as he continues to watch Sybil Vane’s tragic performance. At the end of the production, Sybil is ecstatic, overjoyed to explain to Dorian Gray that falling in love with Dorian made her change her perspective on art, seeing the painted backgrounds as false, and seeing that “all art is but a reflection” (123) of the raw

emotions of life. She rejected the idea of art as a reflection of life, as she began to see the performance as a superficial imitation of the emotions she felt in reality towards Dorian. Dorian, in contrast, is so influenced by his idolized mindset of Sybil Vane that he is unable to agree with her stance. He responds to Sybil's joy by turning away his face, and proclaiming that she has "killed [his] love" (123).

Dorian laments to Sybil that "the world would have worshipped" (124), arguing that without her art, without her display, she is nothing to Dorian, and nothing to the world. He regards Sybil with a look of "exquisite disdain" and where he once saw a figure that he adored, worshipped, fell in love with, he now considered her emotions to "be absurdly melodramatic" (125). While Sybil Vane experiences a "fit of passionate sobbing", reduced from the Juliet on stage to looking like "a wounded thing" (125), Dorian Gray wanders out of the theatre, requesting that he never see Sybil again.

In contrast to his prior view of Sybil Vane as an idol, an objectified display of art on stage, Dorian Gray is faced with the reality of human conflict and emotion, and rather than considering her emotions and personhood, he simply disregards any kind of association with the very human Sybil Vane. When she is unable to produce the effect of a mystical form of influence through her theatrical performance, Dorian Gray is unable to recognize her identity as a person, and sees nothing wrong in just leaving as she proclaims her feelings for him. Because she essentially is not considered an authentic human to Dorian, she is not considered at all and Dorian is able to callously terminate their affections, and does not immediately reflect on his actions as he leaves Sybil and walks home.

Sybil is not given a chance to speak her own voice again in the novel. Wilde continues the narrative to focus on Dorian Gray's perspective, and the audience is simply told through Lord Henry's revelation that Sybil has died. He relates to Dorian that Sybil was found "lying dead on the floor of her dressing-room" (134) after presumably fatally swallowing a substance, which affected her instantaneously. Her death follows from a loss of agency through Dorian's dehumanizing of her character, and the resulting loss of a sense of identity through the declaration that she has no worth in her art, as well as no worth for Dorian's love. Her death resulting from the dehumanization and a loss of her own voice from the narrative suggests that Sybil's character suffered from a loss of identity.

However, even in death, Sybil Vane is not provided personhood from Dorian. In his consolation of Dorian, Lord Henry comments that "there is something quite beautiful about her death" (137), arguing that "the girl never really lived, and so she has never really died" (138). Rather than defending Sybil, through honoring her death and autonomy, Dorian agrees with Lord Henry, claiming that Henry understands his thoughts more than anyone else. Dorian ends his reflection on Sybil stating that "when he thought of her, it would be as a wonderful tragic figure" (140) set on the world's stage. Sybil Vane has her voice taken away in the narrative, as the figure of an 'Other' on idolized display for Dorian Gray's performative view of life. In his destruction of her personhood, Dorian denounces her identity and their connection concludes with an objectified Sybil Vane, merely a romantic figure in life and a tragic figure in death. Her loss of agency is intertwined with her loss of personhood in Dorian Gray's ideology of identity.

The dehumanization of Dorian Gray

Dorian Gray's view of Sybil Vane as an objectified other is a result of the infectious ideology he received, transferred from the musings and monologues of Lord Henry. Dorian fell susceptible to the contagious thought process from listening to Lord Henry's ideology. He was completely captivated by the perspective on indulgence and aesthetic temptation. Lord Henry's words had "touched some secret chord that had never been touched before" and the thought left Dorian Gray's very essence to be shaken, "now vibrating and throbbing to curious pulses" (59) – a physical as well as mental captivation from the contagion of ideology. Through the contagious transfer of Lord Henry's ideology to Dorian Gray's own perspective on society, Dorian's motivations become driven through aestheticism. He learns to value the aesthetic objectification of those around him, thus leading to his objectification of Sybil Vane. While Sybil was transformed into an object merely for display, Dorian utilized the ideology to become a source of transmission, spreading hedonistic ideology in society through his actions towards others.

Although Dorian Gray stands guilty of dehumanizing Sybil Vane as an object on display, he himself is also dehumanized through the idolatry of others. While Lord Henry focuses on a rhetoric of idolatry when talking to Dorian, it is the painter Basil Hallward who contributes to building the mesmerizing effect of Dorian's existence. Basil recalls his first encounter with Dorian to Lord Henry, he felt a "curious sensation of terror" over his body (48). Dorian's appearance left Basil under the impression of an almost otherworldly experience, stating that Basil is able to "see everything in him" as Dorian is the embodiment of "the harmony of soul and body" (52). Lord Henry seems to agree with Basil's assessment of Dorian as a being greater than

human, as he regards Dorian as “unspotted from the world” (57), pure of human ill, when he first views him.

Dorian continues to be dehumanized as a greater-than being by several characters throughout the novel. Sybil Vane discusses him at length with her mother, exclaiming that “to see him is to worship him” (106), praising his character as an entity of divinity based on a display of appearance. Throughout the story, Dorian’s mystical appearance influences characters within society. One character, Alan Campbell, contemplates Dorian’s “indefinable attraction” (196), as Dorian was “to him, as to many others” and embodiment of “the type of everything that is wonderful and fascinating in life” (197). At a dinner party, aristocrat Lady Narborough argues that because Dorian looks so good, he was “made to be good” (209) – as if Dorian’s appearance provided an ‘Other’ status in society, setting him apart from ‘regular’ humans.

Even as Dorian contends with Lord Henry in the latter part of the story that he has changed through sin, Lord Henry argues that the very world itself “has always worshipped you [Dorian]. It always will worship you” (245). Based on Dorian’s pure, unmarred appearance, he is viewed as a dehumanized object of worship in the world. He is viewed as an ‘Other’ – too pure to sin or cast ruin, but is rather a cause for worship and adoration in society.

The dehumanization of Dorian Gray caused his ultimate downfall as he lost agency in his status in society. His identity became solely based on how others viewed him, as a god-like object of beauty, therefore his self-conception was under conflict between the societal conceptions of his pure essence in contrast with the sinful life he was able to indulge in. This conflict between the

illusion of purity in beauty and his indulgence in Lord Henry's hedonistic ideals created cognitive dissonance in Dorian Gray's construction of his sense of self, resulting in confusion of agency and his susceptibility to be controlled through manipulation of others' perception of his character. He lost autonomy through his construction in society as an objectified being, lost the ability to control how others viewed him or his own idea of self-perception. As he became objectified in society, Dorian Gray lost the power to control his own sense of self, and therefore became the picture of the loss of one's own agency.

CONCLUSION

The dynamics of power in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a portrayal of the influence of ideology as a social disease. By using the psychology of identity formation and the concepts of social contagion theories, one may observe that Wilde's fin-de-siècle novel shows a fear of the methods of manipulation of individual agency, particularly as perpetuated by nineteenth-century colonial domination. The historical trends of infectious ideology seen in the cases of the objectification and stolen humanity of Sarah Baartman and other African figures, and the re-education process of the Native tribal culture in North America, are techniques reflected in the power dynamics portrayed in the objectification of Dorian Gray. Dorian is objectified: he is made into an art piece on display by Lord Henry, and re-educated to transmit ideas of hedonism and further objectification into society. Although Dorian loses his sense of self by succumbing to the rhetorical techniques of Lord Henry's whims, there is a movement in the novel's end in which Dorian attempts to take back his agency – to take back his sense of identity from the influence of dehumanization.

The process of identity reclamation: the agency from the display

Near the end of the novel, Dorian's wretched lifestyle leads him to murder his friend Basil Hallward. After this, Dorian goes to a dinner in which he is unable to find physical satisfaction. He "could not eat anything" as plates went away "untasted" (Wilde 207). Dorian "drank eagerly, and his thirst seemed to increase" (207). As Dorian spirals more into living out the corrupt ideology of a hedonistic life, he seems to live an "exhausted life," expressing "disappointment"

in living itself (209). He begins to frequent opium dens in order to “buy oblivion” and “cure the soul by means of the senses” to escape his exhaustion in living.

It is after a hunting trip in which another man ends up dead that Dorian resolves to escape the “crude violence of disordered life” (215). He proclaims to Lord Henry that he had “done too many dreadful things in [his] life” and he is “going to alter” (238). However, Lord Henry seems to denounce the idea that Dorian Gray should attempt to change, continuing his idolatrous objectification of Dorian. Lord Henry states that the world has “always worshipped” Dorian (245). He says Dorian’s life has been his “art”, his days are “sonnets”; he proclaims that Dorian’s life of corruption masked by his youthful appearance has been “exquisite”, to which Dorian responds with exasperation. In this moment, Dorian recounts that it was Lord Henry who influenced his ideological perspective on life – saying that Lord Henry had “poisoned” him once (246). However, even with his resolve to change, Dorian is distraught when he goes home to view the portrait and sees that, rather than changing appearance alongside Dorian’s change of heart, “the thing was still loathsome” (249), still a reflection of a corrupt soul.

Just as Dorian’s portrait still reflected the lasting effect of the power dynamics of his corrupted sense of identity, the lasting effects of a hierarchy of power and dehumanizing ideology is reflecting in society. The dehumanization of colonized people from Africa resulted in the lasting rhetoric of discrimination and sub-human status seen in slavery movements globally. The re-education of Native tribes also last to modern times to the lack of fundamental agency that Native people have in controlling their rightful land and people in America, as they are not viewed with a fully equal status to the majority power. People who have been colonized still feel

the effect of the suppression of a dehumanized sense of self identity. In the historical context, Wilde could never personally identify with the lived experiences of colonized black Africans and the subjugation of Native tribes. Although marginalized in his society because of his Irish background and his sexuality, he experienced a vastly different experience of persecution than the above discussed groups of oppressed people. However, while acknowledging the difference in experience, the psychological techniques of dehumanization in order to maintain social power remains relevant in understanding the historical conflict of oppression in power dynamics. Subsequently, in following the development of the subjugation of others, the problem society faces today is how to reconcile identity reclamation from the legacy of dehumanizing ideology.

In academic discourse, there are several theories as to what the best means of identity reclamation and empowerment for marginalized people in society. One theory in particular is Franz Fanon's theory of the use of violence as resistance from colonial power. Fanon's theory originated in a colonial setting – Fanon was born on Martinique, a Caribbean island which was at the time a colony of France. Fanon studied medicine and psychiatry, leading to his studies on psychological effects of colonial subjugation of Black people and of racism against marginalized groups (Gordon 14). In his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon analyzes the psychosis of the effects of dehumanizing colonial power over individuals, and considers the process of de-colonization and resistance of a free nation. He theorizes that resistance through violence is an effective method of reclaiming a colonized identity. He argues that the “colonised man finds his freedom in and through violence” (Fanon 85) and restore an autonomous sense of self. The context of Fanon's experience with colonial oppression led to his development of a theory of violence as a cathartic and effective means of liberation for colonized people. However, a view

of justified violence is controversial in its reception – his book was acclaimed by key philosophers, but also censored by the French government. It is not an easy task to determine the most effective means of revolution against societal oppression. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian's act of violence as resistance resulted in a desolate outcome for the picture of a successful individual rebellion against societal powers.

After his resolution to “never again tempt innocence”, he felt he had become “pure” and as if “the signs of evil had already gone away” (Wilde 249). Upon returning home, he learns that his own passive resolution was a fruitless declaration as the portrait remained a wicked reflection of his identity, “the red stain larger than it had been” before (249). Dorian panics after this shock and wonders if he will “always be burdened by his past” (250). His actions done under the influence of Lord Henry's ideology are seen reflected in the portrait, a stain that brings “melancholy across his passions” and “marred many moments of joy” in his life. The portrait reflects a “conscience” – the portrayal of his complicit subjugation of others and of himself in society. In realizing this, Dorian resolves to “destroy it” (250). He determines to “kill the past, and when that was dead he would be free” (250). Dorian resorts to violent resistance against the “monstrous soul-life” that displays a wicked societal ill of ideological influence.

However, Dorian's act of violent resistance does not ensure an effective means of reclaiming identity in society. Rather, his violence only assured mutual destruction. After stabbing the portrait, there was a crash and a cry “so horrible in its agony” (250) that Dorian's servants woke and came to see what had occurred. The scene at hand was a “splendid portrait” (251) of Dorian hanging on the wall, reflecting “all the wonder of his exquisite youth and beauty” (251), and on

the floor was Dorian Gray – “a dead man, in evening dress, with a knife in his heart”. He was “withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage” (251). In this moment of violence, there is no hopeful ending as the implications of Dorian’s violence result in mutual destruction in his attempt to be free of subjugation. Rather than reclaiming his sense of self, Dorian Gray is unrecognizable to those who find his body, as they did not recognize him “till they had examined the rings” (251) on his finger, which further diminishes his sense of identity. Dorian also ultimately loses his agency in the narrative, as the novel reflects to a reader’s view of his story. He is destroyed while the portrait lives – while back to a pure image, but Dorian is plagued with his wretched acts through his own change in appearance. It is as though even with escaping the influence of the portrait, he is still ruined by the affliction of dehumanization with the destruction of his own body.

The final scene of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* depicts a bleak end for resistance done through violent means. The result of Dorian’s violent resistance is mutual destruction of his own being and that of his dehumanized reflection. The question then becomes how it will be possible to reconcile reclaiming identity without destroying what remains of the self. Oscar Wilde’s novel reflects techniques of dehumanization and the struggle to maintain a sense of identity against societal ills, however the ending is not satisfactory for a hopeful means of reclaiming identity from oppression. Yet, Oscar Wilde never explicitly spoke of the ills of subjugation and means of resistance – in the opening of the novel, Wilde advocates that “no artist desires to prove anything” (Wilde 41). With this proclamation, the interpretation of literary analysis becomes critical to understanding the implications of Wilde’s writing. The novel suggests the effect of ideological influence in society as an ill of manipulation. Further research is needed to consider

the most sufficient approach on how to cure societal disease of dehumanization, but literary analysis is an effective way to understand the virus and start the making of the remedy.

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