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# When Escapism Becomes Neurotic

A Psychoanalytic Reading of Defense Mechanisms Employed in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as a Medium to Escape Reality

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### **Abstract**

Using psychoanalysis as a theoretical framework, this essay examines the subject of escapism in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde. Defense mechanisms of the ego, first thought of by Sigmund Freud, allow for a clearer understanding of what takes place during the plot. By taking the author's background into account, along with clues in the plot of the novel, a more realistic reading of the novel is made possible instead of a supernatural take. A psychoanalytic perspective allows the essay to explore why and how the protagonist chooses to escape in the novel. The main focus of the analysis is how the protagonist of the novel carries the theme of escapism with increased intensity as the plot progresses. The essay considers why and how Dorian chooses to escape reality and utilizes the theoretical framework for two defense mechanisms used as an aid during escapist activities. Dorian progressively uses the defense mechanisms known as repression and rationalization to support his escapist behavior and protect his ego from anxiety derived from internal and external conflicts.

*Keywords:* Anxiety, Conflict, Defense mechanism, Escapism, Fear, Freud, Psychoanalysis, Rationalization, Repression

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## Introduction

Out of all emotions available in the human psyche, fear likely has the highest significance concerning our survival as a species. Fear can range from arbitrary and mild to specific and intense but does nonetheless play a crucial part while encountering dangerous situations, objects, and other living creatures. This process, first described by behavioral scientist Walter Bradford Cannon, is primarily accomplished by selecting two choices known as fight and flight (Brown and Fee 1594). This essay will examine the latter response portrayed by the protagonist in the novel *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde by using psychoanalysis as a framework. The novel portrays a portrait of the mind rather than a depiction of the supernatural, and Dorian Gray predominantly chooses to flee as a response to the fears that originate in his unconscious. The need to escape leads to Dorian Gray progressively using the defense mechanisms known as rationalization and repression to ward off his fears. In doing so, his actions then become the driving forces that contribute to and advance the central theme of escapism in the novel.

A first glance suggests that it is due to internal fear of fading beauty, aging, and ultimately dying that the need to escape arises. However, by applying psychoanalytic theories, a thorough examination can reveal what other factors might participate in Dorian's choices and what causes them to intensify as the novel progresses. Various forms of escapism are prevalent throughout the novel and include, but are not limited to, art, theater, hoarding, gossip, vanity, drugs, and alcohol. These methods share an underlying reason that sustains the need to attain them, which is reality itself. Although this might sound like a detrimental foundation for escapism, not all forms are harmful. They can be further distinguished into cause-based and effect-based sub-categories where the latter can be viewed as the more positive of methods (Puiras et al. 184). The rules that differentiate which sub-group a medium of escapism falls under have to do with its motive. Cause-based escapism serves to counteract

or remove undesirable aspects of reality, whereas effect-based escapism seeks to elevate reality through the usage of imagination or pleasure-inducing activities (Warmelink et al. 2). Cause-based escapism methods can thus be classified as being negatively reinforced due to the underlying fact of wanting to eliminate unwanted aspects of reality, such as fears or anxiety. Effect-based escapism is instead positively reinforced as the primary reasons behind it are not to eliminate aspects of reality (Puiras et al. 184). Dorian's escapist spiral fits mainly in the cause-based category and increasingly so as the plot unfolds.

Dorian Gray's choices throughout the novel all revolve around the need to escape reality one way or another. This essay will use psychoanalytic theories to analyze different novel segments to understand why and how mainly Dorian requires and attains escapism. Freud theorized that an individual's personality was an archeological site with multiple layers of civilizations that all kept some aspects of each other (Bateman and Holmes 8). Freud eventually revised his topical model of the mind to the id, ego, and superego (Bateman and Holmes 8). Freud referred to this theory as the structural model of an individual's personality, and it consisted of the three different psychological functions that all interact and affect a person's behavior. These effects are a result of the instinctual wishes and drives of the id that constantly clash with the ideals of the superego, and finally, the ego that tries to accommodate and solve any conflicts that arise from these opposite forces of the id and the superego (Bateman and Holmes 35).

The ego, mainly the conscious part of the mind, must accommodate the oppositional forces of the id and superego and those of reality. The id has its impact explained by instinctual drives, whereas the superego deals with ideals derived from parental figures and cultural ascendancy beginning from childhood (Bateman and Holmes 35). The ego, however, has direct contact with the outside world, or reality, and it is also the ego that seeks to escape from it. The internal forces that govern the ego Freud explained as the reality principle and

the pleasure principle (Bateman and Holmes 36-37). If the reason for escaping is cause-based, then it could be deduced that it will involve one or several defense mechanisms.

Anna Freud continued her father's work in many aspects, one of them being the theories of defense mechanisms of the mind. She believed that the functions of the defense mechanisms were a response to both external and internal conflicts of the ego (Bateman and Holmes 38). In the novel, Dorian uses several of these mechanisms, and this essay will limit the scope to observing rationalization and repression. Dorian uses these mechanisms to avoid the discomfort that his ego would otherwise experience during external conflicts with reality and conflicts from within. Through these mechanisms and escapist activities, Dorian aims to avoid fearful truths of reality and alleviate any stress they cause to his ego. However, in doing so, he also seals his fate as neither his methods nor the reasons behind them contribute to a sustainable existence in the novel.

## **Background**

The similarities between today's society and the daily life of the citizens of late Victorian Great Britain presented in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde provide impetus to this literary study. Although the novel primarily caters to the sensibility of the city's upper-class residents, it still manages to bestow the reader with insight into the escapist values and activities exhibited by all social classes of that era. Just as the novel has been the subject of much criticism in the past, today's society might still judge the protagonist's actions. Observing the protagonist, Dorian, society would perhaps judge just as harshly today as back when the novel was published in 1890.

In the Journal *The Scots Observer*, a review that heavily criticized the novel's contents was released the same year as its publication. The review explained that "Mr. Oscar Wilde has again been writing stuff that were better unwritten..." (Mason 26) and went on to

say that the novel "...is false to human nature—for its hero is a devil; it is false to morality—for it is not made sufficiently clear that the writer does not prefer a course of unnatural iniquity to a life of cleanliness, health and sanity" (Mason 26). The contents that take place in the novel were viewed as atrocious and that of perverted evil not compatible with human nature. Another review from *The Athenæum* stated that the novel was "...unmanly, sickening, vicious,...and tedious" (Mason 60). Although both reviews also admitted to Wilde's talented penmanship, the elusive stand of the author regarding the actions of the protagonist still upset the audience. In the preface, Oscar Wilde claimed that "Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming" (ix). This quote can be viewed as a critique of the double standards that society communicated and perhaps still does when judging the actions of Dorian Gray. Oscar Wilde stood behind aestheticism in that art should exist for art and not for someone else. In his essay "The Soul of Man under Socialism" he wrote that if an artist creates for the audience "Art either entirely vanishes, or becomes stereotyped, or degenerates into a low and ignoble form of craft...Its beauty comes from the fact that the author is what he is. It has nothing to do with the fact that other people want what they want" (28). Yielding to the wishes of the public could thus be viewed as one of Wilde's great fears as he would cease "...to be an artist, and [become] a dull or an amusing craftsman..." (28).

It is likely that the ambiguous stand on the actions of the protagonist was made on purpose. The many similarities between Dorian and Oscar Wilde reveal a connection between the author and the novel's protagonist. Just as Dorian is the center of attention of other characters in the novel, Oscar Wilde always left a strong impression on the people he met. One of his friends described his humor to be an "...extraordinary gift...[that]...sprang to show on every occasion (Mikhail 31) and "It was on the spur of the moment that Oscar's humor was so extraordinary, and it was this spontaneity that made him so wonderful a

companion” (Mikhail 31). Friends and people around Oscar Wilde seemed to be captivated by his presence just like Basil and Lord Henry are with Dorian in the novel. Similarly to this, both Dorian and Wilde are preoccupied with the escapist forms of art and take strong stands in protecting them as is evident from Oscar Wilde’s views on aestheticism and Dorian’s absorption with youth and beauty.

## **Theory**

The following section will outline the theoretical framework used to examine the theme of escapism in the novel, and the defense mechanisms of rationalization and repression from a psychoanalytic standpoint. Furthermore, Freud’s structures of the mind will be described to provide a foundation that will allow a clearer understanding of why Dorian acts in the manner depicted in the novel. The theory will be presented, beginning with Freud’s topical and structural models of the mind followed by the principles he used to describe what forces govern the inner world. After that, a general description of the functions of defense mechanisms will be covered and lead into more detail regarding repression and rationalization subsequently. Lastly, current research on escapism and how to classify such activities will be reviewed.

In his book *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud laid the pathway and foundation to a new standpoint on a new field of study that would come to be known as psychoanalysis (Rivkin and Ryan 567). He first established the topographical model of the mind and with it aimed to explain that many of the processes within are not part of the conscious dimension of the brain. Instead, most of the operations within the mind occur while the individual remains oblivious to their existence. This part of the mind Freud referred to as the unconscious, and he argued that this hidden pool of processes had a section, a so-called reservoir of thoughts and memories that one can access through what he called the preconscious (Bateman and



Holmes 32). The preconscious acts as a filter for unconscious processes deemed inappropriate by the mind's conscious part. Passing through this so-called filter, any such feelings, memories, desires, or instinctual drives from the unconscious could reveal themselves as not only peculiar dreams but also in the form of neurotic behavior. According to Freud, society's ideals stressed the importance of the preconscious and caused specific mental processes to be reserved for the unconscious. Individuals gradually learn to cope with family and society's expectations by repressing instinctual processes and adjusting them to being more aligned with acceptable conduct (Rivkin and Ryan 567). Repressing such matters as mentioned above was the reason people experienced eerie feelings of duplicity from within. Both a feeling of familiarity and alienation simultaneously, Freud expressed this so-called stranger from within as being the reason people irresistibly repeated certain behaviors or found themselves in self-inflicted situations even though they were distressing for the conscious part of an individual. In other words, people possess no control over the unconscious (Rivkin and Ryan 567).

Freud understood that his model lacked any corresponding functions for beliefs, morals, or conscience. He also began to see the importance of the external world in molding and affecting internal mental processes, including the unconscious need for defense (Bateman and Holmes 34). A neurotic symptom such as anxiety was viewed with the topographical model as the culmination of repressed and socially unacceptable innate sexual desires that had instead taken the form of a displeasing feeling (Bateman and Holmes 8). However, Freud began to alter his fixation on the inner world and recognized the idea that anxiety can come about as a counterreaction of an encounter in the external world. This response to the threat, such as fear, could either be direct or simultaneously connected to an internal mental process (Bateman and Holmes 34). Eventually, this line of theorizing about the human psyche made Freud create the structural model of the mind (Bateman and Holmes 34).

In this model of the mind, the external world has its role when explaining how an individual adapts to all the conflicts that arise when demands from society clash with internal instincts. The structural model consists of three different components of the human psyche: the id, the superego, and the ego (Bateman and Holmes 35). The id embodies all the innate drives and impulses within humans and corresponds to the unconscious part in the topographical model. However, the two models are not always compatible as all three aspects of the structural model have parts of them that reside in the unconscious. Nevertheless, the id's instinctual drives and sexual desires can emerge, as previously mentioned, through the means of neurotic behavior and dreams. The id is aggressive and sexual and deals only with desires that will move the individual through life to develop, grow, and finally die. This part of the mind is entirely illogical and cannot distinguish between real and fake. Furthermore, although the id is part of the unconscious and the conscious mind represses illogical and socially unacceptable behavior, it can never do so with complete success (Rivkin and Ryan 569).

Freud named the part of the mind responsible for hindering any such direct influence from the id 'the superego'. The superego can be noted as the aspect of the personality trying to conform to an ideal that consists of a mixture of influences from culture, parents, and other authoritative figures in an individual's life from childhood and thereafter (Bateman and Holmes 35). The superego has both conscious and unconscious elements. Without these functions of order, logic, and socially acceptable conduct, the biological drives would run amok, causing potential harmful behaviors and situations for a person and the individuals around them (Rivkin and Ryan 569). The superego takes its form after internal and external occurrences happen to an individual. Depending on the relationship with one's role models, a person might shape a superego that differs immensely from the exemplar set around them. Nevertheless, the superego has its role in a person's experience of wrongfulness and

hesitancy when choosing between right and wrong in various situations, leading it to have a crucial role as a cause of numerous forms of neuroses (Bateman and Holmes 35). Some individuals might only experience the wrongfulness of their actions through what might seem as illogical and unrelated guilt (Bateman and Holmes 36).

The part of the mind that experiences guilt is the ego. According to Freud, the ego is responsible for orienteering through reality while reconciling between the forces of the id's instincts, and at the same time, conciliating the morals of the superego. This process occurs while the ego aims to experience discomfort as little as possible and manages to execute all other aspects of the person's personality. In other words, the ego's function is to bring harmony between all these structures and aspects of the internal and external world (Bateman and Holmes 36). It is important to remember that the processes are not immediate but instead occur with varying degrees of delay. An instinct originating from the unconscious first must pass through filters before it can express itself in the consciousness. A biological instinct will be held back and molded by both the ego and the superego in the structural model (Bateman and Holmes 36).

At the core of the conflict, underneath the id's instinctual drives, the superego's morals, and the reality-pleasing ego, lie two forces that Freud explained as the pleasure principle and the reality principle. In the structural model, Freud saw all three structures as conflicting, both with each other and with reality. The pleasure principle is the force that explains the ego's willingness to follow the id's behavior. In contrast, the reality principle instead describes the superego and ego working to please by delaying or altering wishes. All gratification and pleasure-seeking of the id are constantly impacted by reality, causing the id's inner child to conflict with the ego and superego that wish to conform to the moral values of society (Bateman and Holmes 37). With both the pleasure principle and reality principle, Freud could alter previous views to create one where instead of focusing on internal or

external processes as the leading cause of conflict, it looks at the relationship between the two worlds as the source of much dissension.

Freud thought of the pleasure and reality principles as two of the smallest constants of the human mind that could not be dissected any further or thought of as smaller mental components. Freud thought of the pleasure principle as a force from within striving to avoid any form of pain or discomfort and at the same time maximize pleasure for the individual (Sugarman 9). However, it is essential to note that the pleasure principle and the id are not indistinguishable, as the pleasure principle also governs other minds' structures. Although certain dreams can seem to be in conflict with the pleasure principle, using the example of nightmares, Freud believed that this type of dream served to satisfy both the id and the ego by fulfilling an innate wish while protecting the ego. In other words, the dream's function is to resolve any tension or conflict created between the id, ego, and reality, and pleasure in this sense is the release of any such tension or conflict (Sugarman 10).

There is a distinction between imaginary and absolute satisfaction, leading to the duality between the pleasure principle and reality principle (Sugarman 11). The reality principle serves the pleasure principle. It is the force that mediates the pleasure-seeking behavior by assessing the actual consequences of the action taken to remove unpleasantness. As an extension, the reality principle forces protect an individual's long-term pleasure instead of short-lived gratification that might cause more severe pain as a future consequence (Sugarman 12). The reality principle never acts without the pleasure principle. Instead, the ego tries to protect itself from harm by postponing immediate pleasure in favor of fewer possibilities for more tolerated pleasure. To accomplish this and withstand temporary displeasure is a sign of a matured and well-functioning individual (Rivkin and Ryan 751).

The mind can deploy defense mechanisms to modify the id's instinctual needs and align them under the ego's reality principle, thereby protecting the ego from pain, anxiety,

and danger (Bateman and Holmes 76). Freud thought of defense mechanisms as primarily internal processes resulting from intrapsychic conflicts between the different structures of the mind. When the wants of reality and that of the different parts of the mind cannot accord with the ego, an individual can use one or several defense mechanisms to mediate the tension of the conflict (Bateman and Holmes 76). In other words, their primary function is a way to reduce anxiety for the ego created by both internal and external sources. (Freud and *The Institute of Psychoanalysis* 75).

There has always been much confusion and disagreement surrounding both definitions and a clear line between the different mechanisms since Freud first conceptualized them (Sjöbäck 77). The most common defense mechanism, repression, functions by pushing away intolerable wishes or thoughts from the ego's conscious part. Suppose a thought, impulse, or idea is not in agreement with either reality or the superego. In that case, the ego can utilize repression by placing it in the unconsciousness where it becomes hidden. However, repressed thoughts tend to return eventually. Much anxiety and pain might also remain, causing a need for the ego to utilize other defense mechanisms along the way (Bateman and Holmes 77). A situation such as this inevitably leads to a distortion of the internal reality of an individual. Although relatively harmless in childhood, continuous and excessive use of repression in adulthood can cause dissociative issues of prominent aspects of the emotional life of the person utilizing them (Bateman and Holmes 88). However, Freud still believed that some defense mechanisms were imperative in developing and transforming a person (Bateman and Holmes 78). His daughter Anna Freud continued developing the idea that defense mechanisms have the role of adapting an individual both from within and with the external world (Bateman and Holmes 79). Furthermore, an individual can only sustain repression if it does not clash with a bigger picture of reality (Freud and *The Institute of Psychoanalysis* 71).

Unlike repression, rationalization does not lead to as many repercussions should it persist as a preferred defense mechanism in adulthood. Rationalization is a way of thinking by directing attention away from that which causes stress for the ego. The thinking involved in rationalization appears to be logical and convincing because the conscious part of the ego believes that certain behaviors have rational explanations instead of being caused by the mind's unconscious wishes (Bateman and Holmes 92). Important to note is that the effects of rationalization are usually limited to the person using them. An observer will most likely see through the logic gaps (Freud and *The Institute of Psychoanalysis* 23).

There is also a vast selection of escapist methods available to humans to assist the ego in handling harmful internal and external events. Some aspects of escapism appear to be universal, and the concept is more easily defined by observing how and why a person commits to it. The underlying reasons are usually connected with reality and any conflict with it. The ego finds that something causes anxiety or fear and seeks to nullify the feeling. This type refers to cause-based escapism, and it can be divided into two sub-groups depending on the underlying reason. Either the escapist seeks to stress-relieve a burdensome aspect of their life or want a break from the mundane, essentially meaning they are bored with daily routines (Warmelink et al. 2). Underlying reasons for escapism might also be effect-based, meaning that people seek to escape just because they can. This category has two sub-groups as well: pleasure-seeking and imagination conjuring. As the names suggest, these two reasons for escapism do not necessarily involve a need to eliminate a feeling caused by reality. Instead, they intensify positive aspects of reality by either partaking in a pleasure-inducing activity or perhaps by imagining being somewhere else for a while (Puiras et al. 184).

Furthermore, escapism can also be defined through the activity that is used to escape by looking at whether it is evasive, passive, active, or extreme. The most classic is evasive

escapism, where one avoids an unwanted activity such as thinking about unnecessary details instead of the matter at hand. An activity that would require very little thinking would classify as passive escapism and can include watching tv or listening to music where there is no required input from the escapist. Conversely, if an escapist activity requires input from the escapist, it classifies as an active pursuit that includes running, swimming, or playing games. Finally, there are extreme forms of escapism that have negative connotations to them. In this category, escapist methods such as overeating, manic behavior, extreme gambling, and drug use are found (Warmelink et al. 2).

## **Method**

This literary essay's structure will follow a close reading of the narrative in three different novel areas. An introduction of Dorian's escapism will lay the foundation for the three extracts taken from the rising action, climax, and end of the novel. While the analysis will mainly evolve around Dorian's approaches to and reasons for escapism, other novel characters will be explored to contrast his actions. By analyzing the narrative in select excerpts throughout the novel, it will be possible to shed light on why and how Dorian Gray's relationship with varying methods of escapism develops and intensifies. The central aspect of the rising action discussed is Dorian's relationship with Sibyl Vane and how the theater has a central role in his escape from reality. From the climax and the end, the murder of Basil and Dorian's attitude towards his committed atrocities will be analyzed. A reading will also be made of the few moments right before Dorian's death to close the analysis. Psychoanalytic theories will be applied to isolate findings of fear and defense mechanisms in the protagonist's actions. Evidence of rationalization and repression as defense mechanisms, combined with Dorian's escapist activities, will be observed in the extracts to see how he avoids his fears and anxiety.

The close reading of the novel will view the plot as a psychological thriller with no supernatural elements present as an explanation for the events. The author's background provides an inclination to view some aspects of Dorian Gray as projections of himself and his fears and anxieties stemming from a worry of losing true art and ceasing to be an artist. Oscar Wilde's relationship to religion and belief strengthens the psychoanalytical approach further as he believed that truth and explanations should come from within oneself. In *De Profundis* he wrote that truth, regardless of religion or agnosticism, "...must be nothing external to [him]. Its symbols must be of [his] own creating. Only that is spiritual which makes its own form. If [he] may not find its secret within [himself], [he] shall never find it: if [he has] not got it already, it will never come to [him] (Wilde 9). In other words, Oscar Wilde's attitudes to find truth from within instead of external explanations favor a close observation of Dorian Gray when attempting to describe the reasons behind his actions.

## **Analysis**

This section will extract three main plot segments, along with an observation of the beginning, to clarify how Dorian's escapist methods slowly intensify throughout the novel's events. There will be evidence of the Freudian defense mechanisms known as rationalization and repression as an extension of the presented forms of escapism embedded in these extracts. Although most of Dorian's escapist exploits are destructive, the novel presents a few activities that would be described as harmless using the theory provided earlier. The analysis will begin to look at what initiates Dorian's affinity to escapist activities. What follows are three segments from the book that depict how Dorian's use of defense mechanisms and need to escape reality increase exponentially until the end of the novel. The parts that will be looked at are from the rising action, climax, along with the falling action and end of the plot.



The protagonist's fate is sealed as early as the first few pages of the novel where he is compared to "a Narcissus" and a "...young Adonis, who looks like he was made out of ivory and rose-leaves." (Wilde 3) both of which lay the foundation that foreshadows Dorian's fate. Both Narcissus and Adonis were depicted in Greek Mythology as exceptionally beautiful men whose fates were tragic, albeit for different reasons. On the one hand, the queen of the gods punished Narcissus for rejecting her love and placing his beauty on a pedestal, declaring everyone else unworthy of it. His fate was sealed when he leaned over to drink some water from a lake and fell in love with his image that was cast back through the surface of the water. Mesmerized by his beauty, he tried to kiss the reflection but instead fell in and drowned. On the other hand, Adonis died from a hunting accident, and the goddess of love mourned him. His beauty was celebrated instead of damned, contrasting wildly from the story of Narcissus' beauty. In other words, one story depicts a man deserving of his fate and another one who is a victim of his fate. Since Dorian is compared to both mythological figures, it opens the possibility of keeping an open mind while analyzing his actions in the novel and not judging his choices too quickly.

Early, during the rising action of the novel, an allusion is made yet again to the story of Adonis when Dorian is described as a "...fascinating...son of Love and Death" (Wilde 37). In this instance, personifying love and death alludes to how Adonis was so astonishingly beautiful that it caused a feud between the goddess of love and the queen of the underworld of who should get to care for him. Similarly, mesmerized by Dorian's youth, Lord Henry begins to influence Dorian strongly and is believed to be the one who awakens fear in him. It should be noted that the anxiety and fear that slowly grows stronger and with increased frequency during the novel was awakened and not placed there by Lord Henry. As Lord Henry carries out his speech about impulses, sin, and pleasure, Dorian is startled by the response that takes place within him:

For nearly ten minutes he stood there, motionless, with parted lips and eyes strangely bright. He was dimly conscious that entirely fresh influences were at work within him. Yet they seemed to him to have come really from himself. The few words that Basil's friend had said to him—words spoken by chance, no doubt, and with wilful paradox in them—had touched some secret chord that had never been touched before, but that he felt was now vibrating and throbbing to curious pulses. (Wilde 19)

This passage is one of the first signs of a conflict within Dorian. From a psychoanalytic perspective, Lord Henry introduces Dorian to the instinctual side of all humans that one should not resist under any circumstances. He is, in other words, referring to the id of the mind and the dangers of repelling its pleasure-seeking inclination. He believes that "Every impulse that we strive to strangle broods in the mind and poisons us" (Wilde 18). There is strong support that Lord Henry is speaking of the id and the forces of the pleasure principle. He believes that the way to live correctly is to yield to the id as this is "The only way to get rid of a temptation..." (Wilde 18). The reason his speech creates such a strong reaction within Dorian is that he knows he has "...passions that have made [him] afraid..." and "...thoughts that have filled [him] with terror..." (Wilde 18). He is now merely reminded of it, and it creates a conflict for his ego to manage. The fear and terror within him are purely a result of the ego reacting to the thoughts and passions that do not align with the superego's standards and society. Lord Henry begins to offer an alternative to repressing the wants of the id as a way of satisfying the demands of the superego and the external world. Dorian is genuinely excited about this revelation and takes the bait laid before him.

Despite Dorian's newfound knowledge of an alternative path in life where the forces of the pleasure principle are let loose, he is still hesitant at first. What Lord Henry had declared had made Dorian "...afraid of him, and ashamed of being afraid" (Wilde 21). He goes on to wonder why it had "...been left for a stranger to reveal him to himself?" (Wilde

21). The internal conflict intensifies in Dorian as he feels both ashamed for wanting what Lord Henry proposes, but at the same time cannot admit to himself that he needs someone else to help him. According to himself, he is very young and new to the wonders of the world that Lord Henry speaks of; he sees himself as inexperienced and looks to his new mentor with both awe and fear. Later, Lord Henry connects his theories of yielding to pleasure and that of being young. He exclaims that attempts should be made to satisfy every urge one stumbles upon during one's youth. Once our youth is gone, "We degenerate into hideous puppets, haunted by the memory of the passions of which we were too much afraid, and the exquisite temptations that we had not the courage to yield to" (Wilde 23). As he speaks of this to Dorian, a seed of fear is planted in Dorian's mind regarding missed opportunities that will fade along with his beauty. Just as he becomes aware of the sway his appearances have on the people around him, he also realizes that that will disappear once his outer shell withers. At first, when Basil presents the painting that he has made of him, he is extremely flattered:

When he saw it he drew back, and his cheeks flushed for a moment with pleasure. A look of joy came into his eyes, as if he had recognized himself for the first time. He stood there motionless and in wonder... The sense of his own beauty came on him like a revelation. He had never felt it before. Basil Hallward's compliments had seemed to him to be merely the charming exaggeration of friendship. He had listened to them, laughed at them, forgotten them. They had not influenced his nature. (Wilde 25)

Basil has indeed managed to paint a portrait that depicts Dorian's beauty in its entirety. It becomes clear to the reader that even though Dorian has been told he is beautiful in the past, it has not been clear how Basil sees him until he sees the portrait. However, after the influence of Lord Henry, Dorian becomes aware of the key his beauty holds. This realization is a key that unlocks opportunities that will let him forgo fear and anxiety of repressed desires

simply by yielding to them. The thought of slowly losing this means of liberation frightens him when he thinks of becoming “...dreadful, hideous, and uncouth” (Wilde 25) as he ages and becomes old. “As he thought of it, a sharp pang of pain struck through him like a knife and made each delicate fibre of his nature quiver. His eyes deepened into amethyst, and across them came a mist of tears. He felt as if a hand of ice had been laid upon his heart” (Wilde 25). Ultimately, this fear makes Dorian repress that he is going to age with wilted beauty and thereby lose his chance of liberation from his anxiety. He does this by allegedly striking a deal with the Devil that allows the painting to age instead of him to walk unharmed from the detrimental effects of time. However, as this paper does not assume that there are any supernatural occurrences in the novel, Dorian’s deal will be viewed as the beginning of a neurotic attempt to repress and escape the fact that he will one day grow old and die.

In the beginning, Dorian’s escapist methods that enable him to repress his fears are very benign. Lord Henry becomes the beacon that opens the world of escapism to Dorian. At first, it is mainly Lord Henry’s speeches that captivate Dorian and allow him to leave reality in exchange for a world of philosophy temporarily. The narrative personifies “Philosophy” and “Reality” to intensify their significance for the reader: “The praise of folly, as he went on, soared into a philosophy, and philosophy herself became young, and catching the mad music of pleasure, wearing, one might fancy, her wine-stained robe and wreath of ivy, danced like a Bacchante over the hills of life, and mocked the slow Silenus for being sober” (Wilde 41). What Lord Henry declares resonates so strongly with Dorian that the essence of what he speaks of, his philosophy, takes the shape of a young female, possessed by consuming all pleasurable things in life. His philosophy is to enjoy life to such an extent that it would make Silenus, the mentor of the god of wine in Greek mythology, appear sober. However, Silenus is also present in the myth about King Midas. He received the power to turn everything he touched into gold, foreshadowing that a life led by the pleasure principle only will lead to

terrible consequences. To emphasize this, "...liveried in the costume of the age, reality entered the room in the shape of a servant... (Wilde 42). Dorian's conflict with his ego is further explained by also personifying reality. Reality is not young and not wearing pleasure; reality adjusts, conforms, and ages. Lord Henry is completely aware of the fact that his philosophies are affecting him. "He felt that the eyes of Dorian Gray were fixed on him, and the consciousness that amongst his audience there was one whose temperament he wished to fascinate seemed to give his wit keenness and to lend colour to his imagination" (Wilde 41).

One of the first primary escapist methods the novel introduces to the reader is the theater and the world of acting. Dorian begins to forsake the limitations of the reality principle by escaping to the imaginary world of theatrics. By continuously visiting this world, he temporarily escapes reality and alleviates any conflict between his ego and the other structures of the mind. In the theater, he is free from anxiety rooting itself in his unconscious as the conscious part of his mind is daydreaming:

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... There were moments, later on, when it had the wild passion of violins. You know how a voice can stir one. Your voice and the voice of Sibyl Vane are two things that I shall never forget. (Wilde 50)

In the theater, Dorian finds the actress Sibyl Vane, the transport that enables him to go on his escapist journeys through the make-believe scenarios of various plays. Just like Dorian's, her beauty is described to have such an impact that it opens the doors to the forces of pleasure. Her beauty is so captivating that Dorian cannot contain his tears, and he describes her voice as being equally enthralling to that of Lord Henrys. Both their voices lead the road to the escapist path, albeit very different. Dorian admits to not knowing which one to follow, the

more benign of the two, Sibyl, or the more extremist voice of Lord Henry. Nonetheless, Dorian cannot get enough and, almost like an addict, he continuously visits Sibyl during her acting:

Night after night I go to see her play. One evening she is Rosalind, and the next evening she is Imogen. I have seen her die in the gloom of an Italian tomb...I have watched her wandering through the forest of Arden...I have seen her in every age and in every costume. Ordinary women never appeal to one's imagination. (Wilde 50-51)

Although this type of escapism qualifies as effect-based imagination conjuring, which is a mild and harmless form of escapism, it is most likely a cause-based method of stress-relieving in Dorian's case initiated by an underlying fear or anxiety. In the theater world, he is a passive spectator who can relax and travel to other places where his worries do not exist. Lord Henry sees Dorian's love for the actress Sibyl for what it is, a temporary escape from reality as he has also "... loved so many of them ..." (Wilde 51). On the other hand, Dorian does not recognize that he is using Sibyl as a tool for his incipient escape from reality to repress his fears of fading beauty.

Sibyl Vane also uses her acting to escape reality temporarily. However, since she is an actor taking part in plays, she has an active role in her escapist methods compared to Dorian. She, too, is unaware of the underlying reason for Dorian's strong passion for her and questions why he loves her so intensely in a conversation with her mother. "...why does he love me so much? I know why I love him. I love him because he is like what Love himself should be. But what does he see in me? I am not worthy of him" (Wilde 61). She does not recognize why he is so stricken with her but claims she knows why she feels so strongly for Dorian. As Sibyl continuously proclaims her intense love and keeps on referring to Dorian as "Prince Charming" (Wilde 61), it is revealed to the reader that her previous escapist methods in the theatrical world are replaced by the intoxicating feeling of this personified love. This

replacement ultimately leads to Sibyl not needing to escape through acting anymore since she has Dorian instead. When Dorian invites Basil and Lord Henry to the theater to watch the woman that he wants to marry captivate them through her acting, they do not find the experience as pleasant as Dorian has worked it up to be. Sibyl Vane's acting has become lacking in enthusiasm and her lines in the play "...were spoken in a thoroughly artificial manner. The voice was exquisite, but from the point of view of tone it was absolutely false. It was wrong in colour. It took away all the life from the verse. It made the passion unreal" (Wilde 83). Sibyl Vane no longer possesses the ability to convey passion and invoke emotion through her acting, both major keys in enabling Dorian to escape what troubles his ego and unconsciousness. Sibyl "...spoke the words as though they conveyed no meaning to her. It was not nervousness...It was simply bad art" (Wilde 84), meaning that she ceased to need the art form of acting to escape things in her reality. This outcome leads Dorian to panic as he declares that he wishes she was ill. His fear of losing her acting as an escapist outlet frightens him, and he tries to rationalize what is happening around him to ease the ego's suffering.

In the aftermath of the performance, Dorian approaches Sibyl to understand what is happening. Sibyl is aware of what has happened but wears an "...expression of infinite joy..." and knows "...How badly [she] acted to-night..." (Wilde 86). She continues, despite Dorian's accumulating anxiety, to exclaim that she "...shall always be bad" and "...shall never act well again" (Wilde 86). She openly admits that acting has previously been her escape to such an extent that she thought it was real. "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. I was Rosalind one night and Portia the other. The joy of Beatrice was my joy, and the sorrows of Cordelia were mine also" (Wilde 86). Sibyl did not possess any real feelings of her own as she was constantly escaping by emulating emotions through her acting. However, Dorian's love had now "freed [her] soul from prison" (Wilde 86). The prison she speaks of is

escapism, which can be malevolent if it consumes a person and detaches them from reality.

Dorian cannot handle this change that has taken place, and in a fit, he rationalizes why he is no longer in love with Sibyl Vane:

...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. (Wilde 87)

He represses the fact that he has used Sibyl to escape conflicts rooted in reality and instead blames her for killing his love. Judging by his actions, he has not truly loved Sibyl as much as he has needed her. The love that Sibyl killed was not the romantic kind for her; it was Dorian's newfound love for escapism to soothe the inner conflicts of his mind originating in his unconscious. This event was the starting point of Dorian's endless journey to block out reality through the means of escapism, a journey that increased exponentially through the rest of the novel.

When he arrives at his house after his breakup with Sibyl, he notices that the portrait Basil has painted of him has altered. While looking at it he sees "...the lines of cruelty round the mouth as clearly as if he had been looking into a mirror..." (Wilde 91), meaning that his horrible treatment of Sibyl is now staining the portrait. As this analysis does not presume any supernatural explanations, the painting is viewed as a conflict rising from Dorian's unconscious mind, a conflict between his ego, superego, and the external world, as he knows what he has done was wrong. At first, he tries to rationalize his actions by questioning whether he had been cruel or not. "Had he been cruel? It was the girl's fault, not his. He had dreamed of her as a great artist, had given his love to her because he had thought her great.



Then she had disappointed him. She had been shallow and unworthy” (Wilde 91). Dorian tries to protect his ego from the conflict in his mind by blaming Sibyl for his actions. However, rationalization as a defense mechanism does not entirely tone down the intensity of the inner battle, and he resorts to repression as a supplement. Dorian asks himself if he would “...ever look at it again?” (Wilde 92), and eventually decides to hide it away by pulling “...a large screen right in front of the portrait...” (Wilde 93), signifying the process of repression taking place in his mind. Dorian still believes that he can make amends with Sibyl but the conflict in his mind soon intensifies once he finds out Sibyl has committed suicide. It then becomes apparent to the reader that Dorian had not changed at all. This time he uses both repression and rationalization simultaneously to isolate himself from any responsibility for the suicide. Dorian tells Lord Henry that he is now in danger after Sibyl’s death because there is “...there is nothing to keep [him] straight” (Wilde 100), meaning that with Sibyl’s death, Dorian has lost his first proper method of escapism. He goes on to rationalize the situation by saying that “She had no right to kill herself. It was selfish of her (Wilde 100), and by that further distancing himself from any responsibility in the matter. Since Dorian did not have any time to apologize to Sibyl before she killed herself, he is now left without his preferred method of escapism in this section of the novel. He completes his rationalization and represses any final guilt by declaring that “It seems to [him] to be simply like a wonderful ending to a wonderful play. It has all the terrible beauty of a Greek tragedy, a tragedy in which [he] took a great part, but by which [he has] not been wounded” (Wilde 101). In the end, Dorian uses a reference to the world of theater to escape his anxiety once again.

Dorian’s inner anxiety progressively causes him to find more potent forms of escapism. During the climax of the novel, his repressed conscience, the painting, has become such a heavy burden that he murders in a desperate attempt to prevent his friend Basil from uncovering the fears in his painting and exposing him to the world. Basil has come to Dorian

before leaving town as an act of worry for his friend Dorian. Dorian's extreme forms of escapism had caused terrible rumors to spread; something Dorian wishes not to hear of since "They have not got the charm of novelty" (Wilde 152). He rationalizes his reasons for not being interested to repress the worries of his escapist activities not being private. Basil claims that Dorian is losing his "honour", "goodness", and "purity" (Wilde 154), but Dorian rationalizes and excuses his behavior by reminding Basil that they "...are in the native land of the hypocrite" (Wilde 152). Essentially, he hides his wrongdoings by saying that everyone else is also two-faced in their society, excusing his poor escapist-oriented behavior. Basil says that he refuses to believe any of the rumors but cannot be sure unless he can see Dorian's soul. At first, the notion of sharing what he has worked so hard to repress and escape from scares Dorian. However, he rather quickly "...felt a terrible joy at the thought that someone else was to share his secret, and that the man who had painted the portrait that was the origin of all his shame was to be burdened for the rest of his life with the hideous memory of what he had done" (Wilde 156). Essentially, his joy sparks from the notion that his fears and anxiety will no longer be his burden only. Instead, in a vengeful manner, he will share the inner conflict of his mind with Basil and at the same time punish him for the pain he has caused Dorian. This action is a way for Dorian to repress his feelings of responsibility that plague him on the inside. When he finally revealed the painting to Basil:

An exclamation of horror broke from the painter's lips as he saw in the dim light the hideous face on the canvas grinning at him. There was something in its expression that filled him with disgust and loathing. Good heavens! it was Dorian Gray's own face that he was looking at! The horror, whatever it was, had not yet entirely spoiled that marvellous beauty. (Wilde 159)

Even though this passage would suggest that the painting is supernatural, since Basil can see the changes as well, the analysis of this essay will interpret what takes place as a revelation

for Basil where he finally faces the truth about his friend Dorian. Facing the truth or realizing it would therefore allow him to view the painting as Dorian does. Basil is horrified by the scars that Dorian's fears have left on the painting due to his escapist activities. However, at this point, it should be noted that although his escapist acts have increased in severity during the rising action, and he insists on repressing and rationalizing any conflict he encounters, Basil can still see hope in the portrait. In other words, Dorian is not yet so far gone that he would not be able to confront his fears and anxieties rooted in reality and forgo his escapist ways. In his way, Basil is trying to repress any fears he has of the possibility of losing the innocent and beautiful Dorian. He does not comprehend how it could be the same painting that he had made, and when Basil turns to get answers from Dorian, he greets an escapist spectator that is:

watching him with that strange expression that one sees on the faces of those who are absorbed in a play when some great artist is acting. There was neither real sorrow in it nor real joy. There was simply the passion of the spectator, with perhaps a flicker of triumph in his eyes. He had taken the flower out of his coat, and was smelling it, or pretending to do so. (Wilde 159)

At this moment, Dorian has reverted to his original escapist act of the theater world. With the overwhelming fears and anxieties of his unconscious, the conflicts of his mind have made his ego seek refuge in the first escapist act he felt safe. However, at this point in the novel, repression and rationalization are barely sufficient to sustain any efficient protection of the ego. As prevalent in the passage, he has now decided to make the real world a theatrical stage where he is merely a spectator and cannot be hurt.

Basil tries to make Dorian confront his wrongdoings that have taken place in various forms of extreme escapism so far in the novel. Dorian tries to rationalize his actions further by saying that "Each of us has heaven and hell in him..." (Wilde 160) as a desperate attempt

to repress any feelings of guilt and regret. Unlike Dorian, Basil faces reality even though it causes him unpleasure. Basil is trying to create balance with the structures of his mind and the external world by admitting his wrongdoing. “The prayer of your pride has been answered. The prayer of your repentance will be answered also. I worshipped you too much. I am punished for it. You worshipped yourself too much. We are both punished” (Wilde 161). It becomes apparent to the reader that Basil admits his actions and wants to take responsibility for his actions. However, he also recognizes that Dorian needs to confess his misconduct to solve all current conflicts. Basil attempts to invite Dorian for a prayer to undo Dorian’s wish at the beginning of the novel, but Dorian refuses by saying that “Those words mean nothing to [him] now” (Wilde 161). Dorian’s need to reject reality and escape from it intensifies as he suddenly feels that:

an uncontrollable feeling of hatred for Basil Hallward came over him, as though it had been suggested to him by the image on the canvas, whispered into his ear by those grinning lips. The mad passions of a hunted animal stirred within him, and he loathed the man who was seated at the table, more than in his whole life he had ever loathed anything. (Wilde 161)

The painting is telling him what to do. It is telling him how to resolve the unpleasantness that he is currently feeling. Basil represents reality and any confrontation of Dorian’s actions. The references to the hunted animals connect with Freud’s pleasure principle and the id’s drives utterly devoid of any regulations by the superego. Dorian wants to eliminate the conflict in his mind and attain pleasure through escapism once again, and his id knows the fastest route. In a sudden shift of events, he picks up a knife and kills Basil. To protect his ego afterward, Dorian represses the notion of Basil as a human and objectifies him by referring to his corpse as “it”. In this part of the novel, Dorian’s ego is doing its best to defend itself and manages to

repress once again what has happened, which is visible when Dorian says that “He felt that the secret of the whole thing was not to realize the situation” (Wilde 163).

The theme of escapism is thus far, along with the defense mechanisms repression and rationalization, a central aspect in three major parts of the novel. This includes the beginning of his realization of fading beauty, the rising action surrounding his first true escapist act in the world of theater, and the climax of the novel where Dorian murders Basil. In the falling action, Dorian’s attempts to escape reality to ease his anxiety grow increasingly difficult. His ego tries to repress guilt and shame and Dorian admits that “It was a thing to be driven out of the mind, to be drugged with poppies, to be strangled lest it might strangle one itself” (Wilde 167). At this point, he cannot think of what he has done anymore and admits to the need of repressing the memory or he will go mad. In this instance, Dorian also admits to the need for drugs as a means to repress and escape the conflict of his mind. However, the issue with repressing matters into the unconscious part of the mind begins to emerge almost directly thereafter. An example where it is apparent that his mind cannot cope anymore is when he sketches to distract himself and escape the situation. “Suddenly he remarked that every face that he drew seemed to have a fantastic likeness to Basil Hallward. He frowned...” (Wilde 167). His repressed anxieties now surface even in his escapist acts which signifies an overuse of the defense mechanisms throughout the novel. His unconscious cannot handle the situation of distress for much longer.

Dorian is on a downward spiral as the falling action of the novel progresses. The escalating nature of his escapist activities becomes clearer as the reader finds out Dorian needs to amplify his efforts to keep the pain of his unconscious buried. Dorian continuously tries to repeat Lord Henry’s mantra “To cure the soul by means of the senses, and the senses by means of the soul.” (Wilde 190) to remind him of the only route he can take in his current situation:

Lying back in the hansom, with his hat pulled over his forehead, Dorian Gray watched with listless eyes the sordid shame of the great city, and now and then he repeated to himself the words that Lord Henry had said to him on the first day they had met... Yes, that was the secret. He had often tried it, and would try it again now. There were opium dens where one could buy oblivion, dens of horror where the memory of old sins could be destroyed by the madness of sins that were new. (Wilde 190)

Dorian's cause-based extremist escapist acts leave a scar on the city as he now cannot look at it without the feeling of shame. The city becomes a symbol of reality, which is why it is a necessity for him to seclude himself from society. He mentions drugs, as an extreme form of escapism, and admits to having sought them out many times previously and will continue to do so as there is no other way out of the spiral; to escape his old sins he must commit new ones. He knows that "...though forgiveness was impossible, forgetfulness was possible still, and he was determined to forget..." (Wilde 190). To protect the ego of his mind as he travels to the opium den to forget, he enlists rationalization as a defense mechanism to keep the thoughts of guilt away and asks "...what right had Basil to have spoken to him as he had done? Who had made him a judge over others? He had said things that were dreadful, horrible, not to be endured" (Wilde 192). The defense mechanism is a desperate attempt to avoid suffering as he makes his way to escape through drug use. Dorian tries to place logic on his dreadful actions by accusing Basil of being the wrongdoer and not him. However, this is not sustainable, and opium is the last resort for him to take.

Dorian utilizes both rationalization and repression continuously up until the end where they cannot protect his ego from the conflict with the external world and his unconscious. In the end, instead of admitting fault, he blames Basil for having "...painted the portrait that had marred his life. He could not forgive him that. It was the portrait that had

done everything. Basil had said things to him that were unbearable, and that he had yet borne with patience. The murder had been simply the madness of a moment” (Wilde 228). Dorian is desperate and will not take responsibility for the murder of his friend. He tries to rationalize what happened, making it Basil’s fault that Dorian began his escapist ventures and eventually murdered him. Simultaneously as Dorian rationalizes actions of his past, he also represses his guilt through the claim that he will be good from now on. He represses what he knows to be the reality of his character and hopes that if he is good from now on it will “...expel every sign of evil passion from the face...” (Wilde 228) of the portrait. However, when he looks at it one last time “He could see no change, save that in the eyes there was a look of cunning and in the mouth the curved wrinkle of the hypocrite” (Wilde 228). The portrait tells the reader that all good actions Dorian has made to atone for his wrongdoings have not been pure of heart. Shortly after, the reader understands that Dorian eventually realizes through the portrait that “In hypocrisy he had worn the mask of goodness. For curiosity’s sake he had tried the denial of self” (Wilde 229). The portrait does not lie as it is a genuine representation of not only his conscience but also his unconscious. His true intentions radiate through the image of the portrait and looking upon it had previously given him pleasure as it represented successfully escaping from unpleasure unharmed. However, towards the end of the novel “...It had kept him awake at night. When he had been away, he had been filled with terror lest other eyes should look upon it. It had brought melancholy across his passions. Its mere memory had marred many moments of joy. It had been like conscience to him. Yes, it had been conscience. He would destroy it” (Wilde 229). Dorian is now so far down the escapist path that it is clear his mind is collapsing completely. There is no amount of drugs or any kind of defense mechanism that can protect his ego anymore as he decides to do what comes next. Dorian decides to destroy the portrait, his conscience, a part of his mind, as a last attempt to escape the anxiety that dwells inside of him. It is revealed to the reader, through

the eyes of Dorian's servants, that the painting is a regular painting that still depicts the young and beautiful Dorian and not the hideous creature Dorian himself saw. Dorian does not destroy the portrait but instead commits suicide as a final attempt to escape his fears and anxieties since he could not handle reality any longer.

The end of the novel concludes that the plot that takes place is not of the supernatural genre but that of a man who suffers from neurosis. To argue, from the rising action of the novel, that the devil had a real role in Dorian's unscathed beauty and subsequently his actions are irrelevant as the only real demons in the novel are those that exist in the mind of Dorian. The notion that he ceased to age can be dispelled by an observation of the timeline. At the end of the novel, Dorian is thirty-eight years old, an age which does not correspond to the image that the painting revealed. Instead, the portrait conveyed his inner conflict with origins in his unconscious. To approach the novel from the perspective of psychological realism is strengthened not only by the end, which reveals a regular painting and a dead Dorian, but also by observing the beginning of the novel. The comparison of Dorian to two different men in Greek mythology introduces the concept of a gray area to the reader as a means to understand that what happened to Dorian is the sum of many factors, both internal and external. Furthermore, the background of the author hints strongly at the possibility that Dorian is a projection of himself and therefore his inner conflicts as well. Such inner conflicts can be related to art and beauty, two subjects mentioned frequently both in the novel and by the author through his thoughts on aestheticism and the fear of losing art as an expression of the individual. All of this favors a psychoanalytic approach to the novel, which adds more depth and understanding to the events compared to what a purely supernatural read could possibly attain.



## Conclusion

The scope of this essay has revealed a clearer understanding of how the central theme of escapism has portrayed itself in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The focus of the analysis has followed mainly the protagonist Dorian Gray as he is introduced to the world of escapism and increasingly becomes more dependent on the activities that allow him to escape reality. Dorian's actions carry the theme of escapism throughout the novel as he uses several means to avoid the conflicts of his mind. Freudian theories concerning the defense mechanisms of rationalization and repression have been looked at in conjunction with Dorian's escapist activities to depict which tools Dorian has used to enable and sustain his flight from internal conflict. Freud's topical and structural models of the mind have allowed a comprehensible understanding of where Dorian's conflicts originate and what happens when he uses defense mechanisms to protect his ego and escape the truth. Theories by Warmelink et al. and Puiras et al. have created a perception that has clarified why and how individuals seek escapism.

The beginning of the novel was included to understand where Dorian's need to escape rooted itself. Fear and anxiety in the unconscious lead to desperate acts of escaping reality, where defense mechanisms were employed to protect Dorian's ego. Escapism, along with the defense mechanisms of rationalization and repression, has been identified in three parts of the novel. All extracts have revealed an increased intensity of Dorian's escapist acts, beginning with benign but gradually becoming more extreme. The first section of the novel dealt with Dorian's first actual escapist act into the world of theater. This form of escapism disguised itself as love for Sibyl Vane's character and ended in a tragedy that Dorian tries to repress and rationalize. After the main event of the rising action, the climax has revealed an increased need to avoid the reality that ends with Dorian murdering his friend Basil to quell the conflicts of his mind. In the falling action that follows, Dorian desperately tries to employ his

defense mechanisms and seeks out more extreme escapist acts. The final part observed in the analysis was the moments that lead to the end of the novel and Dorian Gray. As he could no longer achieve the desired effects of escapism, he uses his defense mechanisms one last time to such an extreme that leads to him committing suicide rather than facing the conflicts of his ego.

The reading of the novel has focused on a psychoanalytic approach in favor of a supernatural proposition. By doing so, a deeper understanding has divulged itself about what takes place in the plot. A magical reading would have dispossessed the analysis of more profound meaning and instead have produced a shallow foundation that would have reduced Dorian's actions to a simplistic view of good versus bad. This essay has instead taken the author's background into account to allow a deeper and more nuanced picture of Dorian Gray and the novel. Descriptions of Oscar Wilde's persona have indicated a resemblance between the author and the novel's protagonist Dorian. This similarity has hinted at a correlation between the author's inclination to vanity and Dorian's obsession with youth. Such a comparison has led to an understanding that the novel is more aligned with psychological realism than the supernatural. Furthermore, Wilde's complex relationship with religion has strengthened the proposal that the novel should not reduce to a view of the protagonist's actions as good or evil. Instead, a more refined view observes the complex world of an individual that struggles with real internal demons instead of imaginary external ones.

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