



Homoerotic codes
in
The Picture of Dorian Gray

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INTRODUCTION

Although Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) is considered to be one of the best known homoerotic novels ever written, the novel does not contain any explicit statements of homoeroticism which leaves the novel to be more of a suggestive work of such a theme.

The popularity of the novel has much to do with its author and the scandals surrounding him. Oscar Wilde was a master of controversy, but the greatest scandal of his life was the charge and conviction of sodomy and gross indecency for which he was sentenced two years of hard labour in prison (Raby, xxi). In the Victorian age, homosexuality and sodomy were punishable crimes. Following the publication of the novel many reviews appeared labelling it as indecent. Wilde defended it, saying there was nothing sexual about it. The novel is partly set around an artist's profound admiration for his muse, a young beautiful boy. Since the artist himself is a man, many interpreted this admiration as homoerotic. Wilde, however, described that admiration as merely an expression of aestheticism (Mason, 67). For many, aestheticism and homoeroticism came to be one and the same, or rather, homoeroticism was seen as something belonging to the aesthetic movement (Carroll, 292).

Aestheticism can disguise homoerotic feelings between the men. A great deal of the prejudice against the novel is connected with the idea of masculinity - and how men relate to one another without it being considered improper - as well as with the idea of effeminacy. Since no direct statements of homoeroticism are made in the novel, we have to look closer at some of the things that despite this have caused the novel to be labelled as homoerotic. Wilde could not write an openly homoerotic book so we have to read between the lines for things that can be read one way or the other and thus can divert a reader, mostly his critics, from viewing the book as homoerotic.

The aim of this essay is to examine some of the different codes used by Wilde to show a homoerotic theme in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. By codes I mean indications – consciously or unconsciously inserted by the author – towards a homoerotic theme. The focus will be placed on major codes, such as aestheticism, Hellenism, secrecy and shame and effeminacy. The reason I chose to call them codes is that an attempt will be made to decipher the different themes as one does with codes.

In the essay I will present ideas and ideals used in the novel that I as a reader perceive as homoerotic. The novel itself will, naturally, stand as the primary source.

Secondary sources will mostly be recent articles dealing with this precise topic. The reason behind my choice to use mostly articles is because I wanted as recent information as possible. I also wanted to use works that deal more exclusively with the homoerotic theme or related themes in the novel.

Perhaps a clarification between homoeroticism and homosexuality needs to be made. This essay will not address the question of homosexuality since we do not know what kind of relationship the men had since it is not stated by Wilde. By homoeroticism is here meant how same-sex desire and love can be shown in arts, and as in this case, literature.¹

AESTHETICISM

Aestheticism was a movement during the late 19th century that focused on the idea that art existed for art's sake. Mostly, aestheticism placed a very high estimation on beauty. It was both a literary and social movement, which was ambiguous since its followers differed in the way in which they viewed art and its connection to life (Small, xi). According to Small aesthetes found the greatest spiritual success “to experience life in the matter of art” (xii). Loesberg clarifies it more closely when he says that art for art's sake does not refer to the content of art but “to the way in which art is experienced” (13). Aestheticism seems to have been connected with homoeroticism since it is believed to have “claimed authority over traditionally female realms” (Schaffer, 40). In *The Picture Dorian Gray* I think this can be applied into the high estimation of Dorian’s beauty. Beauty is something that has been seen as feminine. Not often are men referred to as beautiful. Therefore, when men are the objects being seen as beautiful by other men, we can see homoerotic undertones.

Wilde is probably the one most strongly linked to the aesthetic movement (Small, xii). However, Walter Pater, his mentor, is believed to stand as one of the first to take on the movement. Even in the early days of aestheticism the idea that “art should suffer no incursions from the moral sphere” were being expressed (Small, xii). Wilde's idea was that art should not imitate life, but provide a model that is superior to the phenomena that is life (Small, xxiii). As mentioned above, Carroll sees homoeroticism and aestheticism to be extensions of each other: “[t]he personal, sexual source is the homoerotic sensibility that places a maximal value on youth, beauty, and transient sensual pleasure”, (292) and he also

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homoeroticism>

argues that “Wilde associates aestheticism with homoeroticism” (288). It was out of this setting and background that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* emanated.

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* Wilde presents an artist, Basil Hallward, who is painting a portrait of Dorian Gray. Viewing this in the light of the aesthetic movement and its ideas on art and beauty, it does not suggest that the novel has any homoerotic undertones. In the preface to the novel Wilde states that “[t]hose who go beneath the surface do so at their peril” (5). Wilde maintained that it is only a coincidence that Basil's muse happens to be a young man; we are not to bother with his gender at all. Basil claims Dorian to be “all [his] art” now (16). Furthermore, in a dialogue with his friend Lord Henry Wotton, he states that Dorian possesses a beauty “such as Art cannot express” and that “his personality has suggested to [him] an entirely new manner in art” (17). This passage emphasises the aesthetic value of the Basil/Dorian relationship.

However, the passages that follow are contradictory in that they go from confirming Basil's admiration as only artistic to being more personal and emotionally charged. The beginning of the novel is a dialogue between Basil and Lord Henry, where he tells Lord Henry about Dorian and his feelings towards him. Basil states that he does not want to showcase the painting because he has put too much of himself into it. On one hand he claims that a painting “painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not the sitter” (11) and on the other hand he opposes the same idea when he claims that “we live in an age when men treat art as if it were a meant to be a form of autobiography [...] we have lost the abstract sense of beauty” (18). He also says, “Dorian Gray is to me simply a motive in art” (18) and some lines further down he says he cannot show the world his “heart” and his “soul” because the painting contains something more than abstract art. The language in this passage is very suggestive and despite attempts to let aestheticism be the only subject at hand, the homoerotic feelings of the painter Basil are clear and unmistakable when he describes his first meeting with Dorian in a passionate tone. Being overwhelmed by Dorian he was afraid his personality would “absorb [his] whole nature, [his] whole soul, [his] very art itself” (13).

The references to art and aestheticism take an almost defensive tone between declarations of passionate feelings for young Dorian. The rest of the novel does not have such emphasis on art as the first chapters. This, perhaps, is a way for Wilde to prepare and to some extent try to divert the reader from the homoerotic theme by sometimes stating the opposite of what Basil's words convey. Shallowness and superficiality, for whatever reason, seem closely connected to homoeroticism. This profound fascination with physical

beauty that is shown only adds to the homoerotic theme. Aesthetes themselves did not directly claim they took on any homoerotic undertones, maybe because they could not very well claim this without facing the consequences. The aesthetic movement in many ways shone away from lecturing that art and beauty's art should contain any moral propaganda. Some took it as being something of an automatic approach to the new movement. Pater and Wilde were the ones that embodied this specific idea, even though Wilde fails to apply it to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Loesberg claims that there is no such thing as amoral art. Since Pater was one of those who was somewhat of a spokesperson for hedonism among other things, his art becomes art for hedonism's sake (11). In the preface Wilde says, “[t]he moral life of man forms part of the subject-matter of the artist, but the morality of art consists in the perfect use of an imperfect medium. No artist desires to prove anything” (5).

In the case of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* aestheticism works as a code for homoeroticism because of the great value placed on the beauty of one man by other men. It is mainly the fact that Wilde himself is trying to explain away Basil's feelings for Dorian in terms of aestheticism that leads to aestheticism being seen as a code.

HELLENISM

The Hellenistic period (4th -1st c. B.C) was a period in Greek history that is believed to have reached its golden era during the time of Alexander the Great, when the sense of nationalism and greatness grew. It is a period that is believed to have stood for decadence and decline, among other things. This period lasted for three centuries and is hard to grasp in shorter terms. Instead, the focus will be placed on two things that are believed to be connected to homoeroticism and especially homoeroticism in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, namely art and education. The term Hellenism stands for both the period of time in Greek history mentioned above and to Greek studies.

ART

Greek art in general was very much interested in portraying “human figure as an object of beauty” (Pedley, 366) and thus corresponds well with the aesthetic movement as was discussed earlier. Most people are familiar with Greek statues of young men in the nude, the core of Greek art being the fact that the naked male body was idolised and the statues stood as models of perfection and standard. To idolise the male body was not as taboo

during the Hellenistic period as it was during Wilde's time. At this time the artists were predominately male and as far as we know it was not considered wrong in any way if they sculpted a male naked body.

There are a few references made to Greek art and culture in the novel. Dorian is portrayed as an exceptionally beautiful man. The first time we hear of Dorian is on the first page where a “full-length portrait of a young man of extraordinary beauty” stands (7). Dorian is referred to as a “young Greek martyr” (24) and later his beauty is compared to a Greek statue: [g]race was his, and the white purity of boyhood, and beauty such as old Greek marbles kept from us” (45). The references to Greek art and statues and Dorian’s portrait where he stands bear resemblance to the Greek marble statues of young men. In ancient Greece there were no paintings on canvas – frescoes being the only paintings existing – and sculptures being the highest form of portraits.

Since Hellenic culture also had a wish to capture the beauty of human figure through art, it is possible to see a connection between the Hellenistic ideal and the world of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. If we look into possible references merely from an artistic point of view, we can find support for Wilde's intention to see the novel as only aesthetic, only art. What is more interesting, however, is the aspect of Hellenism that Lord Henry is so fond of. Linda Dowling has studied the phenomenon of Hellenism as a homoerotic code during the Victorian time mainly at Oxford University in England (xiii). Greek studies and admiration of Greek art was emerging at that time and Dowling notices an emergence of great minds, like Symonds and Pater, to have brought forward Hellenism with its philosophy and art as some sort of standard for both life and art. Dowling argues that both Wilde and Pater used Hellenism to justify male love (xiii). Therefore, considering that Hellenism functioned as a homoerotic code during this time, Wilde's reference to Dorian in such terms would indicate a homoerotic undertone.

EDUCATION

If we look into the aspect of lifestyle, homoeroticism takes a much clearer role. Since it is a very male world we are presented with in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, we should take a closer look into the equally male world of Hellenism and see what Lord Henry longs for. Hellenism, when it comes to men in particular, is very much a “homosexual” world.²

² In those days there was no such term as homosexuality, no firm definitions of sexuality as we have today with hetero-, bi- and homosexuality. The term homosexuality was first used around mid 19th century.

Other than the references to art stated above more focus is put on a deeper level when it comes to Hellenism. The following claim by Lord Henry is a good example:

I believe that if one man is to live out his life fully and completely, were to give form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream- I believe that the world would gain such a fresh impulse of joy that we could forget all the maladies of medievalism, and reform to the Hellenistic ideal. (25)

Lord Henry here talks of ways of life, how a man could and should live his life for it to be as meaningful as possible. He talks of living out feelings, living out dreams and not be repressed by the “maladies of medievalism”. Since this is a matter of what kind of relationships men could have in the novel, one comes to think of how men could and did relate to one another during the Hellenistic period. To fully understand the male/male relationship in the novel, we therefore need to take a closer look into the male/male relationship during the Hellenistic period known as *pederasty*.

The Oxford Classical Dictionary (OCD) says that *pederasty*, or the Greek word *pederastia*, refers “to the sexual pursuit of “boys” [...] by “men””. Great emphasis is put on the relationship between *boy* and *man* because there were rules to be considered. This relationship was supposed to occur during the boy's adolescence because young boys were “customarily supposed to be sexually desirable to other males mostly in the period of life that extends from around the time of puberty”. Furthermore, the relationship was based on the older man teaching the young boy the ways of life and warfare, how to become a man. Sex could or could not be included in this relationship because it is believed that education stood higher than sexual pleasure between the men. However, a greater generalisation is made that sex was a big part of this interaction between men and boys.³ Some stress needs to be put on the fact that in ancient Greece boys were seen as desirable mostly when they were young and beautiful. In Wilde's novel the praise of beauty and youth holds a prominent position. The whole moral dilemma lies in the fact that Dorian's obsession with youth and beauty leads him to his destruction. Dorian, under the influence of Lord Henry, becomes obsessed with youth and beauty. Later, upon seeing his portrait, he becomes so jealous that he says he would give his soul if he only could trade places with the portrait; that it should age while he himself could stay young and beautiful forever. He says, “[o]h, if it were only the other way! If the picture could change, and I could be always what I am

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homosexuality>

³ Pederasty, and homosexuality today, is often referred to as 'Greek love' (*OCD*). Slang words such as 'going Greek' refer to men that get involved in a homosexual relationship.

now!” (34).

The Basil/Dorian relationship is purer than the Dorian/Lord Henry relationship since the pederast element becomes clearer between the latter two, especially in the way Lord Henry relates to Dorian's beauty and youth, or even beauty and youth in general. He tells Dorian that he has a “most marvellous youth, and youth is the one thing worth having” (29). Further, he talks of beauty as the ultimate power to have because it is “the wonder of wonders” (30). Beauty is even personified because they talk of it as something higher than everything and the word is written with capital letter in a sentence (29). Lord Henry advises Dorian to take advantage of what the Gods have blessed him with, youth and beauty. He says,

You have only a few years in which to live really, perfectly and fully. When your youth goes, your beauty will go with it, and then you will suddenly discover that there are no triumphs left for you, or have to content yourself with those mean triumphs that memory of your past will make more bitter than defeats. (30)

This exclamation that youth is desirable coincides with the pederast values. In ancient Greece it was accepted to be desirable by other men only during one's adolescence and youth. Relationships between grown men were looked down upon since that then took a closer relation to sex and the educational purposes were forgotten.

Jeffrey Nunokawa stresses the fact that Lord Henry takes a pedagogic role towards Dorian and his decadence. He claims that “Lord Henry imagines the scene for seducing a young man as a classroom rather than a bedroom” (187). Further, Nunokawa mentions that “homosexual desire is conducted through schools”. Dowling supports this idea by saying that Greek studies in school were a way of bringing forward the Greek *paidierastia*. Philosophy concerned itself with Plato and his ideas in *Symposium*, where he claims that male/male love only benefits art, philosophy and wisdom (xv). In the novel, Lord Henry is fully aware of the fact that he has a certain power over Dorian and he sees his role towards him as that of a teacher. This supports the suggestion that their relationship shares similarities with that between men according to the Hellenistic ideal outlined above. A Whether Wilde is referring to a homosexual relationship or merely a platonic one is irrelevant since Wilde could not have written about it in so many words. Nonetheless, hints towards homoeroticism are clear and in this case the Hellenistic ideals being so valued bring forth the pederast relationship between Lord Henry and Dorian.

In regard to his pedagogic role, Lord Henry realises this quite early in the novel, at

his very first meeting with Dorian. He has been talking to Dorian about life and showing him new ways of thinking, something that makes Dorian highly confused. When Lord Henry notices this, he feels immense pleasure to have such a power. Wilde writes how “[w]ith his subtle smile, Lord Henry watched him. He knew the precise psychological moment when to say nothing [...] [h]e was amazed at the sudden impression his words had produced...” (27). In addition to this, he wants to own Dorian. He wants to be to him what Dorian is to Basil, someone that consumes his entire being: “He would seek to dominate him-had already, indeed, half done so. He would make that wonderful spirit his own. There was something fascinating in this son of love and death” (46).

The pederast school system was based on the older man being a mentor to the younger man, him having the more active role in the relationship. When the young man later reached the age of adulthood he took the role of mentor towards another young boy. Although Dorian in no way is an adolescent boy but a man of twenty, the relationship between him and Lord Henry is of pederast nature. He is the passive one; he is the one that takes in all that Lord Henry has to teach him. Later in the novel we see him take a more active role towards other young men when he is accused of corrupting them and thus we see that the student has become the teacher. At the end of the novel Basil confronts Dorian about his bad reputation (171) and that his relationship is “fatal” to these young men (173).

Hellenism did not have the same restrictions as Christianity later placed on sexuality and homosexuality in particular. A wish to forget all the “maladies of medievalism”, as Lord Henry put it, can be a way of bringing forth these restrictions that religion put on homosexuality. Dowling states that Hellenism at that time worked as an opposition to Christian theology (xiii). The medieval times mark the ending of the ancient culture, the fall of the Roman Empire and bring forth the control of the church over people. Hellenic culture had in fact, as has been shown, a very homophile construction of society which makes it easy to see the references as codes for homoeroticism. Wilde’s own time was a time full of prohibitions and love between two men was a crime. It is therefore possible to assume that Wilde used his novel to proclaim a wish for a more Hellenic influenced society where, like in the ancient times, love between two men was praised rather than condemned.

SECRECY AND SHAME

Secrecy and shame are significant issues in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Secrecy and shame are also vital aspects of the homosexual community for the simple reason that homosexuality has been seen as something indecent, and sometimes even evil during our course of history. The novel has a sense of disguise in everything; nothing is said straight out but leaves you wonder what is going on.

The Picture of Dorian Gray develops around the lives of the three main characters, Dorian, Basil and Lord Henry. To define the characters as potentially homosexual men in the novel, one needs to characterise Basil and Lord Henry for they are responsible for Dorian's character. In the first chapter the reader encounters Basil and Lord Henry conversing and has the opportunity to know the two men first hand. At this point Dorian is merely a character in the background, someone we know through Basil's and Henry's conversation. We learn that he is extraordinarily beautiful and that he has a fascinating character (13). What that personality is is hard to say at this point since his physical appearance is in focus throughout the first chapter; he has not yet appeared himself. It is under later interaction with them, mainly with Lord Henry, that Dorian develops into a more multifaceted character. Cohen sees Dorian as “born of the conjunction between Basil's visual embodiment of his erotic desire for Dorian and Lord Henry's verbal stimulation of such desire” (806). Furthermore, he views Dorian as a “space for the constitution of male desire” where he functions as the tool with which Basil's and Lord Henry's desires are described (806).

About one third of the novel is about Dorian's exploration and realisation about himself with the help of Basil and Lord Henry. In addition to this, this part of the novel also sets the background of their lives and characters, which later leads them further into decadence, and eventually to Dorian's fall. This part also contains the most interaction between the characters and the way in which they relate and react to one another. This very close interaction between the characters comes across as homoerotic in a way which will be explained later. It is a section where the characters seem to realise things about themselves in a way that remains hidden from us because these realisations seem to be full of terror and fear of being exposed.

BASIL/DORIAN

The novel starts out in Basil's home where he and Lord Henry are spending a day together.

In the middle of the room stands the portrait of Dorian, which leads to the two men talking about him. We learn that he is very important to Basil and the way in which he speaks about him is very personal and has a homoerotic undertone. Basil tells Lord Henry of the first meeting with Dorian:

When our eyes met, I felt that I was growing pale. A curious sensation of terror came over me. I knew that I had come face to face with someone whose mere personality was so fascinating that, if I allowed it to do so, it would absorb my whole nature, my whole soul, my very art itself [...] Something seemed to tell me I was in the verge of a terrible crisis in my life [...] I grew afraid, and turned to quit the room. (13)

Artists are often referred to as eccentric and passionate, which can make this very astonishing reaction of his to be only fascination for an artistic object as it was said before. But these are very strong feelings of one man towards another. This fact can never be disregarded or diminished and sets the tone for homoeroticism. Basil's physical reaction can very well be seen as physical attraction and the fear he shows can be the fear that is associated with coming out, the fear of going against the norm and someone finding out.

As we learn more about Basil and Dorian's first meeting the homoerotic theme becomes more tangible. Basil says "we were quite close, almost touching. Our eyes met again" (14). This is a great indication that shows a meeting beyond aesthetics only. It shows an emotional, possibly even erotic, emotional connection between the men. In many ways this interaction can be seen as flirtatious and certainly not a manner in which men were supposed to relate to each other. It shows the men sharing looks and glances, noticing the physical closeness and feeling something for one another. Dorian seems to share this feeling. Basil says: "[Dorian], too, felt that we were destined to know each other" (14). Since Dorian feels the same way we can assume that what is shared between them is not a matter of an artist and his subject, but a man and another man. We also learn that Basil flatters Dorian and finds "strange pleasure in saying things that [he] know[s] [he] shall be sorry for having said" (19). If we now consider the fact that Basil flatters Dorian constantly by giving him compliments, an interpretation of this as courtship is not that farfetched. A heterosexual friendship between two men does not consist of this kind of flirtation and courtship. Basil saying to Dorian something he will regret having said also indicates that he has uttered words he would normally not say to anyone else. Thus, it seems clear that his feelings for Dorian are something new and unfamiliar to him. Presumptions that this is some sort of sexual identity being awakened are easily made.

What is apparent about Basil's revelation about himself after meeting Dorian is that his life is now embedded in secrecy. Secrecy, as stated above, is something that comes with the territory in these situations. Secrecy having such a big part in Basil's life, and this is stressed quite evidently in the first chapter, is a clear indication that something is not what it seems to be. Wilde creates a world of mystery which makes us question the supposedly "straight" relationships, making it a code towards homoeroticism. Basil says that he has "grown to love secrecy" (10) and the painting of Dorian bears "the secret" of his own soul (12).

There are a few contradictions in Basil's words that could support the argument that there is nothing homoerotic about his relationship for Dorian. As was mentioned before, Basil says that Dorian to him is "simply a motive in art" (18). This goes against any notion that he has a "crush" on Dorian or that his feelings for him go beyond aestheticism. Furthermore, he opposes art as a reflection of the artist himself when he states the following:

We live in an age when men treat art as if it were meant to be a form of autobiography. We have lost the abstract sense of beauty. Some day I will show the world what it is; and for that reason the world shall never see my portrait of Dorian Gray. (18)

This statement leaves us to believe that Basil sees Dorian as some kind of personification of beauty. Therefore, the painting should not be seen as an autobiography of his life. However, Basil is a very contradictory character and it is hard to determine what his feelings are. Just a moment earlier he has told Lord Henry that he will never exhibit Dorian's portrait because "[he has] put too much of [himself] into it (9). He also says that "every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not the sitter" (11). What can we make of this? Cohen believes that Basil is facing a crisis in his life and is transforming something he does not understand to something familiar, namely aestheticism (806). This means that the attempt to disguise homoeroticism in aestheticism fails in this case as well.

DORIAN/LORD HENRY/OTHER MEN

The same crisis that Basil seems to be going through in regard to his feelings for Dorian, Dorian seems to go through in regard to his feelings for the other two men. He becomes confused about his feelings towards Basil and, in particular, towards Lord Henry. When

Lord Henry finds Dorian by himself in the garden he

...came close to him, and put his hand upon his shoulder [...] [t]he lad startled and drew back [...] There was a look of fear in his eyes, such as people have when they are suddenly awakened [...] You are a wonderful creation [says Lord Henry to Dorian]. You know more than you think you know, just as you know less than you want to know. (28)

Dorian has discovered something that is new to him, something that is frightening because it is unknown to him. He does not know why Lord Henry has this effect on him: he wonders “[w]hy had it been left for a stranger to reveal him to himself” and ponders on the fact that suddenly “there had come someone across his life who seemed to disclose to him life's mystery” (29). The way in which Lord Henry pursues him by stepping closer and touching him reveals something to Dorian; it is that touch of the stranger that makes him realise something about himself. The word ‘disclose’ stands out since that is used when something that is hidden, secret, comes to light.

Earlier than this Lord Henry tells Dorian how men are not able to live their lives as they want to, that the “terror of society, which is the basis of morals, the terror of God, which is the secret of religion [...] are the two things that govern us” (25). Here the text comments on the norm and the morals of society that make it impossible for men like Lord Henry to live life fully and openly as they wished.

Shame has a very central role in the novel as well, being closely connected to secrecy. Rasmussen says that the “relationship between inclusivity and coming out, [is] a relationship that often situates the closet as a zone of shame and exclusion” (144). Lord Henry, when issuing his powerful influence over Dorian, notices the distress the young man undergoes and he also says,

You, Mr. Gray, you yourself, with your rose-red youth and rose-white boyhood, you have had passions that have made you afraid, thoughts that have filled you with terror, day-dreams and sleeping dreams whose mere memory might stain your cheeks with shame. (26)

This shame reoccurs many times in the novel and becomes a larger theme towards the end when Dorian has led a life of debauchery and immorality that has brought shame to his name. One day Dorian meets Basil who wishes to talk to him. This leads to a quarrel that ends in Dorian murdering Basil after showing him the portrait that bears all the signs of his immoral ways. Before this Basil expresses a concern for Dorian's increasingly bad reputation, something that does not concern Dorian very much. Basil sees “it right that [he] should know that the most dreadful things are being said against [him] in London” (171).

Basil asks him why it is so that “so many gentlemen in London will neither go to your house nor invite you to theirs?” (172). This in itself does not have to raise any suspicions about homoeroticism, but we soon learn that Dorian's friendships, in lack of a better word, to these gentlemen of London have not always been this bad nor has he been seen down upon before.

However, when we come to a more elaborate account of what kind of relationships Dorian has had to numerous young men in town we learn that is not something that is talked about and it therefore remains hidden from us. Had it not been something shameful it would not have been kept in the dark. We know that he has behaved in a shameful way towards many of the men and ruined their good names in the process. In Basil's question we learn more about these men:

There was that wretched boy in Guard who committed suicide. You were his great friend. There was Sir Henry Ashton, who had to leave England, with a tarnished name. You and he were inseparable. What about Ashton Singleton and his dreadful end? What about Lord Kent's only son, and his career? I met his father yesterday in St. James Street. He seemed broken with shame and sorrow. What about the young Duke of Perth? What sort of life has he got now? What gentleman would associate with him? (173)

It is implied that Dorian has led them down this path of shame and interestingly enough, this corruption mirrors that which Lord Henry had upon his own character. Dorian does not admit to Basil's accusations and says what the slandering tongues of London make up does not concern him, and he blames the fall of these gentlemen on various other things. Meanwhile, Basil maintains that Dorian bears all blame of their fates since he was the one who has “filled them with madness for pleasure” (174).

Lastly on the subject of shame and secrecy, the character of Alan Campbell needs to be addressed. After killing Basil Dorian needs someone to dispose of the body. He calls upon Mr. Campbell to do the job since he is interested in science and would know how to cover the tracks. We know that music and “that indefinable attraction that Dorian seems to be able to exercise whenever he wished...” (190) was what brought the two men together and that their “intimacy” lasted for eight months. We learn that Campbell bears great hate towards Dorian for the past they share and that he therefore refuses to help him. Despite the hateful relationship of the two men, there is great intimacy being shown. For instance, when in all haste Campbell calls Dorian by his first name, Dorian says “Ah! I was waiting for you to call me Dorian” (193). Later when Dorian holds their once close friendship as a reason for Campbell to help him, Campbell tells him not to “speak of those days, Dorian.

They are dead.” (195).

In the end Dorian resorts to blackmail for Campbell's help. He writes something on a piece of paper, something that makes the other man “ghastly pale” and “a horrible sense of sickness came over him” (195). The reader never learns what the note said. This kind of blackmail was considered to be a part of the homosexual community since homosexual men lived in fear of being exposed for their sexuality. Nunokawa notices “the threat of blackmail that never eases to darken it” in the novel and what is believed to have been a reality for homosexual men during Wilde's time (183). During Wilde's time, something called the *Blackmailer's Charter* was another name of the law that made sodomy punishable and the sentence was oftentimes death (Norton 2000).

EFFEMINACY

The Picture of Dorian Gray comes across as a very effeminate novel, both in its presentation and in the way the characters are described. The novel is in fact presented in a rather 'straight' fashion when the homoerotic theme is downplayed when not explicitly stated. But effeminacy comes across not only in the way the characters are presented, but in the language Wilde uses to show a rather “feminine” world. Wilde does not present any of the characters as homosexual. In fact, Lord Henry is married and Dorian falls in love with an actress, but both these relationships are very superficial. It is a very straight language in that sense, but on a closer look we see it is not the case. By writing in the manner that he does, Wilde himself shows an effeminate streak as it will be shown further down.

Since the setting of story is believed to be “saturated with homoerotic feelings and style” (Carroll, 295) we will take a closer look into this. By setting it is not only meant the place in which the novel takes place, but the whole world which it involves. It is a matter of values, theories and environment that sets the background of a possible homoerotic and effeminate world. Carroll goes as far as describing Wilde himself as an effeminate man. He sees what he calls a deep symbolic structure in the novel and says that Wilde assimilates the culture configuration available to him in the novel (288). Seeing how he is believed to view aestheticism as an extension of homoeroticism, the greatest direct statement against this on Wilde's part, aestheticism, thus becomes one of the greatest codes for homoeroticism. Adding Schaffer's previous statement that aestheticism penetrated fields previously dominated by women, it automatically effeminizes the followers of the

movement, in this case clearly the three main characters of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

Descriptions of the setting can be described as soft or even feminine. When we first encounter the world of Dorian Gray it is described in light feminine tones, something that enhances homoerotic atmosphere:

The studio was filled with the rich odour of roses, and when the light summer wind stirred amidst the trees of the garden, there came through the open door the heavy scent of lilac, or the more delicate perfume of pink-flowering thorn. (7).

Descriptions like these of roses and other flowers are very feminine, in accordance to Schaffer's statement that Wilde as an aesthete has touched on areas before only dominated by women (40). Wilde is thought to have used a straight language to disguise the homoerotic elements, but that is not applicable here since this is not a very "manly" world or description. The reason for this is that the general idea is that male homosexuals automatically take after heterosexual women and therefore colours and behaviour usually attributed to women become "gay" when attributed to men (Standfort, 598. Note 9).

Feminine behaviour by men has more or less always been looked down upon, even during Wilde's time. Standfort points out that "feminine characteristics are less valued than masculine ones, in general, but especially in men" and that "transgressions into femininity by men are more negatively valued than transgressions into masculinity by women" (599). Schaffer believes that male aesthetes to "justify this behaviour, they had to create a visual style which metonymically associated themselves with women while distinctly affirming their superiority" (42). This means that during those days it was more acceptable to take on this feminine and aesthetic lifestyle for men like Wilde, who is believed to have been a dandy. Carroll states,

Among heterosexuals, feminine characteristics act as a stimulus or trigger for male sexual desire. One chief reason effeminacy can be easily integrated with a homoerotic persona is that effeminacy indirectly suggests that the effeminate male could himself be an object of male desire. (296)

Dorian and Lord Henry are thought to be dandies, which in turn led to the effeminacy of the characters to cause much debate. In the novel Lord Henry is referred to as a dandy when his uncle says, "I thought you dandies never got up till two..." (41). Elisa Glick writes, "[a]s the cultural critic Michael Bronski puts it, "dandyism was an exercise in perfecting the externals"; as a result, the dandy for Bronski is "all style and no content"" (130). This corresponds well with the aesthetic ideals that were applied by Wilde and Lord

Henry in the novel.

Lastly, let us take a closer look at Dorian Gray. As the protagonist of the novel he is most known to us. Effeminate is a word that would suit well to describe Dorian seeing the ways in which he is described and behaves. The language that Wilde uses to describe him is yet again very soft and very feminine. He is described as beautiful with blue eyes, crisp blonde hair and “finely-curved scarlet lips” (23).

Following the release of the novel the reviews that criticised it paid attention to the effeminacy of Dorian Gray. In the novel when Dorian is displeased he “made a little *moue* of discontent to Lord Henry, to whom he had rather taken a fancy” (24). One reviewer calls the characters puppies, noting Dorian's behaviour in the previous quote to be improper for a boy of twenty years (Mason, 18).

Carroll, likewise, views Dorian's behaviour to be more fit for a woman than for a man, no matter his age. In the novel Dorian is upset that the painting will forever remain beautiful while his beauty and youth will wither: “The tears welled in his eyes; he tore his hand away, and, flinging himself on the divan, he buried his face in the cushions, as though he was praying. (35). Carroll finds “[s]cenes of women lying prone and weeping are common enough in Victorian fiction; scenes depicting males in that posture are vanishingly rare” (297).

Carroll has very clear ideas of where the boundaries of gender roles should go and in what way homosexuals and heterosexuals should and do behave. Although many of his and the existing views on gender roles are highly generalised, we are prone to make presumptions on what is manly opposed to effeminate and how that fits in the question of homosexuality and homoeroticism.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this essay has been to look closer at some of the homoerotic codes in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. What we today see as codes may or may not have been the author's intention, since time has changed the way in which we view certain things. Regardless if Wilde wanted to write the novel in what we see as codes, readers of all times have viewed them as such. The homoerotic theme has been fairly easy to pick up on.

In the matter of aestheticism I think the homoerotic theme is something that has been attributed later seeing how many of the followers were or were suspected of being

homosexual. Men being so fascinated by other men's physical beauty will always raise suspicions, no matter their intention. The norm of society through history has proved very much against homosexuality, and consequently homoeroticism. Admiration of human beauty has been something that is believed should take place between two people of the opposite sex, not of the same.

Hellenism is something that is harder to grasp in connection to homoeroticism. It is harder to decipher for the average reader not educated in classical studies. Even if the connection between Hellenic values and homoeroticism is made, it is still hard to see just how elaborate, smoothly and smart Wilde makes that connection. It is not a matter of direct statement such as a wish to go back to Hellenic ideals. By showing the teacher/student relationship between Lord Henry and Dorian, we see the subtle references to the pederast school system of ancient Greece. By later allowing Dorian to break free of Lord Henry and himself take the role of the active teacher we see the basis of the pederast ideal where boys when growing up took that role towards another young boy. The fascination with beauty and youth, and how all pleasures of life can be held only as long as beauty and youth last, is also a way of pointing back to the Hellenic ideals that men were allowed to be desirable only when young. The same goes for the British schools where homoeroticism was a part of youth that ended, or was supposed to end, upon graduating and entering adulthood.

With the power of the church coming to dominate and then diminish the heathen religions we see a much more severe view on homosexuality that until some time ago was punishable by death in the western world. This has led to homosexual women and mostly men having to live in secrecy and fear of being exposed. So much of the novel is never exposed; so much needs to be read between the lines since Wilde leaves you in a sense of curiosity about what he *really* is talking about. This sense of secrecy works as manifestation of what homosexual men of that time had to live with. The characters of the novel, Basil and Dorian in particular, show this fear of what has been revealed to them about themselves since meeting Dorian and Lord Henry respectively. These revelations that are never fully elaborated make the reader think of self realisation. Since the homoerotic theme is so tangible the references to self realisation about their sexuality is the subject at hand. What else could make the men so afraid and so secretive?

The greatest presumption we have about homosexuality is that homosexual men are very effeminate and by writing three major characters, and especially the protagonist, in such effeminate manner, Wilde could never escape the label of homoeroticism. Although dandyism being the fashionable way to be for Wilde and his peers at that time, it became

more taboo in connection to his very public trial and conviction of gross indecency. In the end all comes down to the presumptions and prejudice of what is homosexual and what is heterosexual since the gender roles are not always black and white. Even without his personal scandals of homosexuality being known the book still came across as homoerotic. His trial and conviction did not occur until after the release of the novel.

To conclude, I wonder if someone reading *The Picture of Dorian Gray* for the first time without any paratextual influences that give away the novel as homoerotic would view it in quite such a light. Do we read too much into it?

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