

Lacanian Interpretation of Dorian Gray's Self-Identifying under the Influence of Others

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Abstract

In Oscar Wilde's only novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the protagonist Dorian Gray undergoes the psychological journey from ignorance to self-realization under the influence of Others including Lord Henry Wotton, artist Basil Hallward, and the magic portrait. It is due to the profound impact from the outside world that Dorian Gray alienates from his original self and remolds himself into an entity that is guided by Others. In interacting with Others, especially the intrusive patriarchal signifier, Dorian Gray acquires his self-identity through accepting and modulating his various images reflected in others' discourses, which can be interpreted in relation to the progression of three phases of Jacques Lacan's Mirror Stage Theory and three levels of semiotic complexity. A Lacanian reading of the early mirror stage of ego formation can be extended to better understand Dorian Gray's self-construction process on both a psychoanalytical and semiotic level, with an emphasis that Dorian Gray's journey to search for self is based on the powerful influence of the Others. The paper suggests that characters around Dorian Gray are playing respective roles of mother, father, and the mirror that dominate an infant's self-identification between Lacanian Imaginary and Symbolic orders.

Keywords: Lacan, Dorian Gray, mirror stage, self, Other

1. Introduction

Oscar Wilde's only novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* has undergone severe critique in the academic world ever since its publication in 1890. Over a century of studies have been extensively conducted on Wilde and the novel from aesthetic, historical

and psychoanalytic perspectives. It is recognized within the academic world that the three chief male figures in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*¹ embody different aspects of Wilde's own identity, and that identity is fundamentally divided against itself. The novel is thus a "psychodrama" (Carroll, 2005, p. 300). In the novel, the protagonist Dorian Gray is separated between his inner portrait and outer appearance, undergoing the psychological journey from ignorance to self-realization. The psychological development of Dorian Gray is never static as he grows to realize and identify himself under the influence of the outer world, termed Others. The Other represents "other people", other subjects whom the individual encounters in social life, but for Lacan it also stands for language and the conventions of social life organized under the category of the law.

According to Jacques Lacan's Mirror Stage Theory, which is viewed as the metaphorical process of human psychological development from child to adult, the process of a person's self-realization is intervened and influenced by the Others. In interacting with the Others, Dorian Gray acquires his self-identity through accepting and modulating his various images reflected in Others' discourses yet ends up in mental distortion and self-destruction. Such self-identification is generated and cultivated by not only his portrait and all the characters around him, but also the inevitable power of the particular social environment. The Others that constantly exert great influence on Dorian can be divided into two categories: little Others and big Others. Broadly speaking, little Others can be thought of as neighbors, fellow citizens, enemies, friends, peers, or lovers, and big Others as collections of social conventions, codes, norms, laws, etc. The two kinds of Others exercise their great power over Dorian Gray's self-construction throughout the whole story.

This paper attempts to explore the psychic and semiotic transformation of Dorian Gray by making a detailed analysis of these Others' influences, aiming to enable a fuller understanding of Dorian Gray's psychic process of self-identification and his final self-destruction as well as a more comprehensive insight into this masterpiece.

2. Lacanian Big Other and Little Other

Lacan's Mirror Stage Theory proposes the triangle of Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic as the three basic phases in forming the subject's self-identity. Lacan points out that only when an infant comes into the mirror stage, has the formation of I come into

being. The infant forms the ego through the illusion of a unified conscious self that he or she identifies with as an image in the “Imaginary” order. The Imaginary is a phase that objectifies completeness and negates absence, deficiency, and want. The Imaginary world is a condition in which the infant becomes aware of his or her bodily functions and mobility and develops a sense of the external world (Abdul-Jabbar, 2015, p. 163).

The Symbolic world manifests itself in language, laws, and culture. Language is a system in which the signifier determines the subject, and the metaphoric presence of the “father” introduces the child to this Symbolic order (Abdul-Jabbar, 2015, p. 165). Lacan introduces the “father” as a signifier, which he terms the “Name-of-the-Father”, and marks the Oedipus complex as the initiator of the transition to the Symbolic world and relations between perceptions of self and others. It is during the Symbolic stage that the subject comes to identify the self and the Other.

Apart from this “Name-of-the-Father”, the mother also works as a significant Other that provides an act of self-recognition as the infant sees a complete “I-Ideal” of himself or herself in the mother’s face, which “situates the agency of the ego” (Lacan, 1977, p. 2). Lacan applies the concept of “the Other” to refer to objects that exert influence on the subject and contributes to the formation of its ego in mirror stage and he identifies Other as little other and big Other. Dylan Evans explains that little other is the other who is not really other, but a reflection and projection of the Ego and is entirely inscribed in the Imaginary order; but the big Other designates radical alterity which Lacan equates with language and the law, and hence the big Other is inscribed in the order of the symbolic (Evans, 1996, p. 133).

As Dorian Gray seeks to construct his self in the Real stage, little others come to exert their influence over him and guide him into the Imaginary order where Dorian Gray forms himself in this stage of identification. At the same time the big Others also participate in this self-construction process through invisible interaction with the protagonist.

3. Dorian Gray’s Psychological Journey to Search for Self

Lacan uses the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic to refer to the respective discourse levels, on the basis of which subsequent communicologists have adopted the terminology of Direct perspective, Meta perspective, and Meta-meta perspective

(Lanigan, 2015, p. 108). According to Lacan, self-identification is the transformation that the subject has undergone when it identifies itself with the mirror image. Before his acquaintance with Lord Henry, Dorian is what the artist Basil holds as the aesthetic ideal, totally unconscious of his youth and beauty, equivalent to a newborn baby or infant in the mirror stage that has no idea of this outside world.

However, deeply affected by other characters around him and the magic portrait, as the intrusion of the “mother” and “father”, Dorian begins to pursue sensual pleasure and eternal youth in life and finally turns into an evil and corrupt person. As the story moves forward, the little others: actress Sibyl Vane, artist Basil Hallward, Lord Henry Wotton and the avenger James Vane, as well as the delicate picture, all exercise huge influence on Dorian Gray.

The fundamental development of a *Self* concept is a minimum unit relationship in which a *Person* compares the perception of one *Self* to the perception experienced by an *Other* person (Lanigan, 2015, p. 119). Under Others’ impact, Dorian commences his pursuit of self-identity to satisfy his excessive desire, which actually is the desire of the Other: especially Lord Henry and Basil Hallward, who respectively accomplish hedonism and aestheticism from Dorian. Lord Henry takes Dorian as a tool to practice his hedonism theory while Basil Hallward regards Dorian the incarnation of his aesthetic ideal. Dorian Gray alienates himself in the process of self-identity after entering into the symbolic realm and signifier chain and lingers between the imaginary and symbolic realms, ending up in his destruction as he attempts to ruin the magic picture. The self-construction of Dorian is formed under the influence of the Other’s mirror image, and his whole psychological transformation corresponds to the three levels of semiotic complexity, that is, Direct perspective, Meta perspective, and Meta-meta perspective.

Apart from the surrounding characters, Dorian Gray lives in an era confronting social transformation and one that is full of social conflicts, which also exerts significant influence on Dorian’s self-realization process. Ideologically, the Victorian era witnessed resistance to the rationalism that defined the Georgian period and an increasing turn towards romanticism and mysticism with regard to religion, social values, and arts (Dixon, 2010, p. 35). Industrialization brought the era a rapidly growing middle class whose increase in numbers had a significant effect on the social strata: cultural norms, lifestyle, values and morality. As the society stepped into a modern mode, people felt that their belief systems were being constantly rewritten

and dismantled by science, culture, and technology, and many attempts were made to get a handle on transitions at this time of uncertainty and on-going change (Waldrep, 1996, p. 105). Driven by social interests and public demand, the social climate at that time started to advocate pleasure and indulgence, seen as reactions to constant developments in the new era, yet such practice of hedonism played a great part in Dorian Gray's gradual degeneration. The Victorian social norms and codes worked as the big Other that shaped Dorian Gray's worldviews and guided his daily behavior, witnessing him degenerate into a hideous playboy and callous murderer in the course of the story.

4. Dorian Gray's Construction of the Imaginary Self

Generally Dorian Gray's self-identifying process goes through three major stages: at first Dorian totally has no idea of himself and his independent identity, mentally controlled or manipulated by the Others, Henry and Basil, meaning the erasure of real self; as the story advances, Dorian becomes increasingly possessed by the Others, actress Sybil and the fascinating portrait, and lives in an illusory world believing in eternal youth and beauty, meaning the construction of imaginary self; and at the end of the story, Dorian Gray gets tired of the luxurious and dissipated life, and comes to realize that it is the living death of his soul that troubles and ruins his life, meaning the pursuit of real self.

It is due to the Others' various influences that Dorian Gray gradually transforms, but the process of Dorian's self-identification lasts his entire life. Although little others and big Others are all responsible for the process of Dorian Gray's self-realization and self-degeneration, the ways they invade into Dorian's spirituality and the degrees to which they reconstruct his identity vary from one another. The influences of the Other, especially the exquisite portrait, Lord Henry Wotton and artist Basil Hallward are inseparable with Dorian Gray's complicated psychological journey.

4.1 Influence of Lord Henry—In the name of the father

Dorian Gray was born in a relatively broken family in which his parents' marriage was filled with pain and agony: the mother snatched away by death, the boy left to solitude and the tyranny of an old and loveless man (Wilde, 2012, p. 36). The incomplete family background strips Dorian Gray of the necessary contact with

parents throughout childhood as well as the ordinary social relationship with peers or friends. The abundant heritage of his grandfather paves the way for Dorian to enter into the world of the upper class. Through the artist Basil Hallward, Dorian meets Lord Henry Wotton, and soon is enthralled by the aristocrat's hedonistic worldview, as stated in the novel, "Live! Live the wonderful life that is in you! Let nothing be lost upon you. Be always searching for new sensations. Be afraid of nothing... A new Hedonism—that is what our century wants" (Wilde, 2012, p. 24).

Lord Henry is the most influential Other towards Dorian Gray's whole life as he remolds Dorian by preaching his new hedonism. In Lacan's view, the infant has no sense of himself as a separate entity and no distinction between Self and Other. Lord Gray, as a pure "infant" in this story, separates himself from the world around him with the coming of the "father", Lord Henry. Under the hedonist influence of Lord Henry, Dorian believes that beauty and sensual fulfillment are the only things worth pursuing in life and he starts to fully explore his sensuality. A Direct Perspective is taken when Dorian observes and interprets an Other's (Lord Henry's) behavior while a Meta Perspective occurs when he tries to infer Lord Henry's perceptions or understand his experience.

Lord Henry fancies a kind of life that he cannot experience by himself due to his aging status, therefore he feels jealous towards the young and beautiful Dorian Gray. Lord Henry is well aware that only through instilling his theory into the innocent lad Dorian Gray can he have the chance to enjoy the fruit of his own belief and theory. Ever since their first encounter Lord Henry intentionally applies his power and influence over Dorian Gray in order to fulfill his avaricious desire and Dorian Gray, resembling an innocent new-born baby, easily follows Lord Henry's guide and instruction, "Yes; there had been things in his boyhood that he had not understood. He understood them now. Life suddenly became fiery-colored to him. It seemed to him that he had been walking in fire. Why had he not known it?" (Wilde, 2012, p. 21)

Semiotically, once the communication system for Direct Perspectives is in place, the interaction can move up one logical level of complexity to the Meta-perspective, where interpersonal communication begins to make an assessment of their personal *Self* perception of that perception which is from the point of view of the *Other* person (Lanigan, 2015, pp. 120-121). Lord Henry persuades Dorian Gray to value sensual pleasure and luxurious life. With his bewildering words, Dorian Gray is psychologically stirred and enticed to thoroughly consider Lord Henry's theories.

It is also due to Lord Henry that Dorian Gray discovers a fascinating book, a story of a young Parisian who spent his life trying to realize, in the nineteenth century, all the passions and modes of thought that belonged to every century except his own. For years Dorian could not free himself from its influence. As a result, Dorian Gray searches for sensations that would be at once new and delightful, which are quite alien to his nature but satisfy his intellectual curiosity.

4.2 Influence of Basil Hallward—The role of the mother

In addition to Lord Henry's influence, Basil Hallward is another important Other who initiates Dorian Gray's tragedy in a rather indirect way. Unlike Lord Henry who's particularly good at employing eloquent and paradoxical languages, Basil Hallward is unwilling to "bare his soul" and keeps silent all the time. However, both verbal and nonverbal interaction between people are dynamic processes where expression constantly changes such that perception remains constant between two people in a given situation (Lanigan, 2015, p. 109).

Like Lord Henry, Basil Hallward is also deeply impressed and infatuated by Dorian's pure beauty, and he believes that Dorian's beauty is responsible for the new mode in his art as a painter. However, Basil disagrees with anything that is expressed by Lord Henry regarding his philosophy of pleasure and he tries to keep Dorian Gray away from Lord Henry. However, both Basil and Lord Henry yearn to dominate and mould this beautiful young lad in their own way and they both believe that Dorian Gray is a piece of work of their own making. Just as Dorian Gray states, "Basil would have helped him to resist Lord Henry's influence, and the still more poisonous influences that came from his own temperament" (Wilde, 2012, p. 113).

If Lord Henry is the "father", a signifier of power and law for the Dorian Gray's self-identifying, Basil Hallward must play the role of the "mother" that leads the "child", Dorian Gray, to the mirror, that is, the magic portrait. For Lacan, the role of the mother is unquestionably significant, because it is the mother who introduces the infant to the mirror and often confirms the baby's discovery in a form that uses its name: "'That's John in the mirror!'"—a formation that suggests the image in the mirror is a double, another baby, and reinforces the baby's own perception of itself as an object" (Bailly, 2009, p. 37).

According to Basil, every portrait is the painter's narcissistic projections rather than the realistic representations of the model. By painting it, he has, at one

stroke, repainted himself as he would like to be and froze Dorian as that which, at a distance, mirrors and supports his own desire (Mahaffey, 1994, p. 197). Basil's painting is a supplemental way to convey himself as he puts too much self into the work. His idolatry for Dorian Gray reveals the aesthetic conception that the acceptance of artistic beauty and taste is a fundamental standard:

Unconsciously he defines for me the lines of a fresh school, a school that is to have in it all the passion of the romantic spirit, all the perfection of the spirit that is Greek. The harmony of soul and body—how much that is! We in our madness have separated the two, and have invented a realism that is vulgar, an identity that is void. (p. 13)

Though unable to render forceful verbal expressions, the artist freely shaped the hero's identity with the power of his delicate painting. Lacan argues that subjectivity arises when an infant catches a glimpse of himself in the mirror and takes the image to be himself. For Dorian Gray, he regards the beautiful image reflected in the portrait as his real self. Henry terrifies Dorian with the scare of getting old while Basil inspires Dorian to preserve his beauty in the portrait. It is Lord Henry and Basil Hallward that arouse Dorian Gray's consciousness of self with different methods during the first self-identifying stage, and due to their influences Dorian begins to perceive himself in a brand-new way, which corresponds to the process of erasing his "original" self as the self he constructs at this phase is actually the selves of Lord Henry and Basil Hallward.

4.3 Influence of portrait and Sybil Vane—The mirror of the protagonist

Prompted by Lord Henry and Basil Hallward, Dorian Gray alienates from his former self and remolds himself into an entity that is guided by Others. During his pursuit of forever youth and beauty, Dorian Gray encounters the exquisite and perfect portrait of him, which plays a significant role in constructing his "imaginary" self. As the title of the book suggests, the portrait of Dorian Gray accounts for one of the most important elements in the story, acting as the catalyst for the protagonist and the story that unfolds around it. At the sight of portrait, Dorian Gray recognizes his incredible physical beauty and the prime of youth. Through the portrait, Dorian obtains a preliminary conception of his total form, namely his self-image, for the first time. It is by being inspired by the delicate picture that Dorian Gray identifies himself from

Others and deems that he is superior to others.

The picture uncovers Dorian Gray's extraordinary beauty and initiates his libidinal dynamism and narcissistic self-identity. As the story develops, this portrait becomes an indispensable part of Dorian, only through which he could recognize his true self. The novel presents us with a protagonist who engages in various immoral acts, including the murder of the artist Basil Hallward, while taking no responsibility for these acts, and projecting them metaphorically, through their grotesque "physiological distortions", on his "double", the portrait (Robinson, 2021, p. 3). Referring to the portrait, Dorian cites two lines from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which provokes us to think about the relationship between him and the magic picture: "Like the painting of a sorrow, a face without a heart" (Wilde, 2012, p. 202). The incisive lines not only refer to the picture, but to Dorian himself, who's been reduced to "a face without a heart" under the influence of the portrait.

As stated in Mirror Stage Theory, once the child is conscious of the relationship between the reflection in the mirror and himself, he will stand in front of the mirror gazing at his own image and make gestures to see his changes in the reflection. Like the child who discovers the secret of the mirror, when Dorian Gray realizes the meaning of the portrait's magic to him, he plans a future of pursuing unrestrained pleasure. To this extent, it is possible to believe that Dorian's all kinds of pleasure-seeking explorations are his response to the finding of beauty and youth. Dorian yearns to seize his transient youth, which would otherwise fail to last forever, and he expresses his desire to be spared from the passage of time. He even fancies that the picture will replace him to grow old and ugly while he stays young and beautiful for good:

How sad it is! I shall grow old, and horrible, and dreadful. But this picture will remain always young. It will be never older than this particular day of June... If it were only the other way! If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that—for that—I would give everything! I would give my soul for that! (p. 27)

Newly understanding that his beauty will fade, Dorian expresses the desire to sell his soul, to ensure that the picture, rather than he, will age and fade with time going by. The wish is granted, and Dorian pursues a libertine life of varied amoral experiences, while staying young and beautiful externally; all the while his portrait

ages and records every sinful doing. When Dorian abandons Sybil and the poor girl commits suicide, the picture alters, and Dorian discovers that the man in the portrait bears a subtle sneer of cruelty on the mouth. The picture imitates Dorian's growth to which he submits himself and at the same time it is through the picture that Dorian loses himself. The picture in its silence and perfect stillness invades and replaces Dorian Gray's autonomy without his awareness, designates his gradual degeneration and determines his fate.

During the various psychological stages, Dorian fails to understand the fact that he is actually identifying the Other rather than himself. Thus when he finds that even good deeds cannot change the mirror picture and his resolution to be good is denied by the portrait, Dorian loses his faith in the reformation of the self he once persisted in. The construction of Dorian Gray's "imaginary" self is also closely related to Dorian's first love—actress Sybil Vane. Sybil's genius for acting realizes Dorian's aesthetic ideal and makes the hero hunger for her presence. Dorian's obsession with Sybil constitutes a search for what may be called fulfillment, which can both satisfy Dorian's desire and compensate for what he lacks, especially a transient innocence. Considering the background Dorian grows up in, it can be argued that Dorian's affection for Sybil partially also manifests a demand for a maternal love he unconsciously looks for.

Dorian reconstructs the imaginary order and relocates his self-identity through the dual relationship with the mirror image of the portrait and the romance with Sybil Vane. Besides sparking Dorian's imagination, Sybil mirrors Dorian Gray's self-identity and represents his pure and innocent boyhood. As an actress, Sybil shares every single emotion of the heroines she plays and blends her real self with the figures in various dramas, and Dorian mistakes her assumed image for the real Sybil. Ever since meeting Dorian, Sybil loses her marvelous acting ability as she is enlightened by Dorian about what reality is. Sybil's disappointing performance of *Rome and Juliet* shatters the myth Dorian constructs or in other words, destructs Dorian's imaginary image, ending up with Sybil's suicide.

The entangled relationship between Dorian Gray, Sybil Vane and the magic portrait creates an "imaginary" world for Dorian Gray where the self-identity he forms is actually that of the Other. This level (Meta-Perspective) is characterized by the conscious or unconscious perception of expressive actions by other persons, with the sense of Other existing within an Imaginary relationship to the Other (Lanigan, 2015,

p. 125). Dorian at one time feels conscience-stricken when he observes the corruption recorded in his portrait and decides to reconcile with Sibyl, but he is too late, as Lord Henry informs him that Sibyl has ended her life by swallowing prussic acid. Dorian then understands that, where his life is headed, lust and good looks shall suffice. Dorian locks the portrait up, and over the following eighteen years, he experiments with every vice, influenced by a morally poisonous French novel that Lord Henry Wotton sends him.

5. Dorian Gray's Return to the Real Self

Enabled by the portrait, Dorian Gray leads a corrupt life in which his body and soul are alienated for eighteen years. His young and beautiful appearance remains to the public and bewitches a group of innocent youngsters who admire him, while deep inside his soul there is nothing good or beautiful, only devilish traits such as selfishness, cruelty, violence, etc. He murdered Basil in order to conceal his dirty secret that the portrait has changed, and he threatened Alan Campbell to deal with Basil's body and to hide his evil deeds.

It seems that Dorian Gray is, throughout the whole story, practicing the desires of little others, such as Lord Henry and Basil Hallward, but in fact, he is attempting to realize the ideal of self-development advocated by the aesthetics of the eighteenth-eighties by giving expression to every cultural and hereditary legacy he can detect within himself (Dickson, 1983, p. 11). Dorian Gray is not simply the story of one man's attempt at self-discovery but represents the failure of a whole generation to achieve its ideals. Since Lacan equates big Other with language and authority, social norms and climates during the Victoria Era are inscribed in the Symbolic order as the big Others that determine Dorian Gray's moral transgression.

The Symbolic world manifests itself in language, laws, and culture. Language is a system in which the signifier determines the subject and the presence of the father introduces the child to this Symbolic order (Abdul-Jabbar, 2015, p. 165). At this point the "father" of Dorian Gray is not simply Lord Henry Wotton but the pervading lifestyle of hedonism of this particular era and it sews the subject, Dorian Gray, into the symbolic order, presenting him as both an imaginary individual and a subject of legal responsibility and social expectation.

Not until the end of the story, when Dorian witnesses James Vane's miserable

death and upper class's indifferent attitude, does he come to realize that he has done too many dreadful things in his life. The "infant" finally discovers that the self that is mirrored in little others is not his real self and thus attempts to break through the forced normality of the Symbolic order. Dorian finally gets tired of the luxurious but meaningless life and all the gossip and criticism coming from the public. He awakes to the truth that his obsession with eternal youth and beauty only leads to a dead end:

It was his beauty that had ruined him, his beauty and youth that he had prayed for. But for those two things, his life might have been free from stain. His beauty had been to him but a mask, his youth but a mockery. What was youth at best? A green, and unripe time, a time of shallow moods, and sickly thoughts. Why had he worn its livery? Youth had spoiled him. (p. 207)

The real failure of Dorian Gray, as Wilde acknowledges about his own life, is the failure of the will to assert itself in the formation of one's character (Dickson, 1983, p. 12). Experiencing all the ups and downs, Dorian Gray comes to realize that he lives in a virtual and imaginary world created by Others surrounding him. The external youth and beauty can never compensate the loss and destruction of his internal quality. He wants to chase for his "real" self, eager for a new life free from the influence and shackles of the Other. Wilde (2012) stated at the end of the story, "It was his duty to confess, to suffer public shame and to make public atonement" (p. 209). To rebuild a Symbolic world in the way of killing the past and his monstrous life, Dorian Gray at last plunges a knife into the portrait, which is tightly bound with his "imaginary" identity as his final quest of "real" self. Dorian Gray desires to shatter his "imaginary" self that is constructed by Others in order to constitute a "whole" self that is free from Others' desire or influence. Dorian's decision to attack the painting is actually due to his rebellion against being devoid of a moral system. The picture relinquishes its role and returns to its original form are affirmations of the arbitrariness of human existence (Gillespie, 2015, p. 30).

6. Conclusion

During the process of Dorian Gray's psychological transformation, the issue of

influences forms the central theme of the novel. Dorian Gray perceives himself as an independent wholeness with the help of Others, such as paradoxical Henry, dedicated Basil, the exquisite painting and innocent Sybil. However, Dorian blends himself with the different figures around him, even including the fictional figures in the yellow-covered book, and he identifies himself with sinners in history and his ancestors narcissistically. In Dorian Gray's self-identifying, the collision between the Imaginary and the Symbolic worlds produces alienation, in other words, a divided sense of self. Yet for Lacan, alienation is an essential constitutive feature of the subject. The subject is fundamentally split, alienated from himself, and there is no escape from this division (Evans, 1996, p. 9).

Dorian Gray's psychological journey of self-construction is a continuous process of struggling "between two worlds" created by Others. Lacan argues that "the source of speech is not the ego, nor consciousness, but the unconscious; language comes from the Other, and the idea that 'I' am master of my discourse is only an illusion" (Evans, 1996, p. 56). The Imaginary world is characterized by the formation of the Ego through identification with an image of the self, and the mother image initiates the Mirror Stage and provides the seed for the formation of the ego. The influence of the "mother", as Basil Hallward introduces the "infant" to the mirror, the magic portrait, marks the protagonist's entering into the Imaginary order.

The presence of the "father", represented by both Lord Henry and the Victorian social atmosphere, constructs the "imaginary" self of the "infant" through his powerful influence where the "infant" Dorian Gray gradually generates "an implicit ethical imperative to break the mirror, an imperative to disrupt the imaginary in order to reach "the symbolic", which is the register of language, social exchange, and radical intersubjectivity" (Gallop, 1985, p. 59). In the end, when Dorian Gray finally perceives what he had been doing for the past eighteen years under the manipulation of Others, he also reaches a reconciliation with his real self. He could eventually leave behind the symbolic desires of Others that are imposed on him and create his own symbolic world and pursue his real self with relief.

Apart from the inevitable influence from Others, what hinders Dorian Gray from regaining his lost self is his romance with his own corrupt nature (Manganiello, 1983, p. 30). It is the intuition or knowledge that Dorian consists of two personalities in opposition to one another that drives Dorian to war with himself. After three stages of erasing the real self, constructing the imaginary self and questing for the real self,

Dorian Gray completes his psychological journey of self-identification under the influence of Others. From Dorian Gray's lingering between the "imaginary" and "symbolic" worlds during his whole process of self-construction, it can be found that the absence of free will is especially apparent in Wilde's manipulation of the plot. A character's resolve is frequently stymied by uncontrollable circumstances (Dickson, 1983, p. 10), which leads us to rethink the correlation between one's subjectivity or self-realization and the overwhelming influence of the outside world.

Note

- 1 Quotations from the novel in this paper are all from the third Bantam Classic edition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray and Other Writings* as shown on the works cited page. This edition is quite up-to-date and decently edited by Richard Ellmann, an American literary critic and biographer of Irish writers.

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