

“All influence is immoral:” Actor-Network Theory in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

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English

“All art is quite useless,” writes Oscar Wilde in his preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (4), a novel, originally published in 1890, in which a work of art, a portrait, is not “useless” but instead is a character in itself, a moral compass, influenced by and influencing the other major characters in the novel. Protagonist Dorian Gray, a young, handsome, wealthy man, becomes the muse of esteemed artist Basil Hallward, who paints a realistic portrait of Dorian. Basil introduces Dorian to scandalous, immoral, clever Lord Henry Wotton, who becomes a bad influence on Dorian, and when the painting is finished, Dorian, after speaking on the ills of aging with Lord Henry, laments that the painting will stay beautiful while he ages, unleashing a curse in which Dorian himself remains beautiful but the evils committed by his soul cause the painting, locked away in an upper room, to transform. This transformation of the portrait is the product of influence, but also influences the plot significantly. “There is no such thing as a good influence, Mr. Gray. All influence is immoral—immoral from the scientific point of view,” says Lord Henry to Dorian in their very first meeting, something that rings true throughout the novel. Actor-network theory (ANT) can be used to explain and understand the influences of and on the portrait in this novel. French philosopher, anthropologist, and sociologist Bruno Latour describes ANT as the “sociology of associations” in his book *Reassembling the Social* (9), and these associations include actors from the nonhuman world as well as the human. Using this theory, I argue that in Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the portrait is itself an actor, and although it is hidden away and unseen throughout much of the main action, it is nonetheless the fourth major character of the novel. The other three major characters, Dorian, Basil, and Lord Henry, each

influence the portrait in its creation and subsequent ruin and in turn the portrait influences them. The Dorian figure who is out in the world, reveling in self-indulgent and destructive habits and remaining young and handsome, is actually the portrait in that he is outwardly unchanging. The tucked-away portrait of Dorian, on the other hand, is the man's real soul, becoming aged and more hideous with each immoral act. Reading this novel through the lens of actor-network theory allows one to better understand this switch, because ANT allows for the perception of the portrait as an actor in the same way the human characters are.

Actor-network theory is interested in explicating the connection between all things, human and nonhuman, and the influence this connection has on the outcome of events. According to Latour, 'social' is not a homogeneous thing, not solely a relationship between humans; rather, it is the trail of associations between heterogeneous elements. He writes, "social does not designate a thing among other things ... but a *type of connection* between things that are not themselves social" (5). Thus, the fabric of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* includes human and nonhuman actors, whose actions are woven together so tightly that it is difficult to untangle each character's or object's influence in the grand scheme of the plot. Firstly, it's important to wonder: why did Wilde choose to use a supernatural portrait to tell his story of morality and aestheticism? In his article "On Being One's Own Heir," Andrew G. Christensen wrote on the popularity of magic picture stories as a genre around the time Oscar Wilde was writing, and the ways in which portraiture was a symbol of heredity and inheritance. According to Christensen, "The focus here is on the metaphysical inheritance suggested by the supernatural portrait, wherein the self is heir to its own past" (159). In other words, the moment Dorian's portrait is completed, it already represents a past Dorian whose youth and beauty can never actually be reclaimed in life, as he is aging every second whilst inheriting his own past. Dorian laments on

this fact, especially after hearing the words of Lord Henry: “Time is jealous of you, and wars against your lilies and your roses. You will become sallow, and hollow-cheeked, and dull-eyed. You will suffer horribly,” (Wilde, 23). This newly-instilled fear of the loss of aesthetic beauty, coupled with the sight of the gorgeous, youthful painting, causes Dorian to curse the portrait: “How sad it is! I shall grow old, and horrible, and dreadful. But this picture will remain always young ... 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 ... there is nothing in the whole world I would not give! I would give my soul for that!” (Wilde, 25). It is in this moment that Dorian switches places with the portrait; gives up his pureness of soul to remain young and beautiful. According to Latour, “social, for ANT, is the name of a type of momentary association which is characterized by the way it gathers together into new shapes” (65). Dorian’s existential crisis in viewing the painting causes his soul to change shape, revealing his innate tendencies toward the level of superficiality and narcissism causing him to openly value aesthetic beauty and the hedonistic pleasures presented by Lord Henry over aging gracefully and maintaining morality in his soul.

This cursed switch of Dorian and the portrait is reminiscent of Dorian making a deal with the devil, so to speak, much like he is a protagonist in a Faustian myth. Patricia Dita writes of the interference of late Victorian genres in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, since in her opinion the novel relies on Faustian myth, particularly with regard to the thematic treatment of the protagonist. The Faust myth has roots in German legends of the late medieval era and also primitive Christian tenet, and it is essentially a tale in which a “Faust” character makes a deal with a demon to acquire knowledge and power. “There is no doubt that Dorian Gray is another Faustian character, who through the influence of the flamboyant Lord Henry Wotton, ‘sells his soul’ for youth, sensations, experience and pleasure ... Dorian is not fully aware of the fact that

his desires will eventually come true, where the picture will represent his true soul, and he, the individual, will represent the picture” (Dita, 348). In other words, Dorian makes a deal he is not even aware he is making; in wishing he could switch places with the portrait and remain young, his soul is transplanted onto the portrait so that his sins will show there, while his appearance remains youthful and lovely, outwardly clean of wrongdoing. Through this deal, the portrait is no longer just a portrait; it is a demon, a soul transplanted onto a canvas, an actor hidden away in a remote upper room who is still wreaking havoc on the plot. In contrast, Dorian walks free as an angel in appearance, but he is an angel who is empty of his soul.

The portrait itself becomes a character and an actor in this novel even before Dorian makes this deal. At the outset of the novel, it’s important to note the ways in which Dorian, Basil, Lord Henry, and the portrait interact with and influence each other. Michal Ginsburg discusses the relationship between the three men and the portrait in his book *Portrait Stories*. Once the painting itself is finished, each man is given a traditional role to occupy: Basil as painter, Dorian as sitter, and Lord Henry as viewer (Ginsburg, 99). But, as Ginsburg notes, these roles are not set in stone; “since the novel starts at the point where the portrait is just about finished, the story it tells is primarily that of the portrait’s effects, that is, it puts all three characters in the position of viewers” (99). Thus, the portrait is an actor affecting the actions of the human characters in the novel immediately. In Rita Felski’s article “Latour and Literary Studies,” she discusses ANT through the ways that art and literature can influence viewers and readers, so obviously it can be applied to the portrait’s effect on the three men in the story. She writes, “the task of the critic is to follow the actors along the networks of words, things, ideas, images, and practices through which they are constituted. In this sense, poems and paintings possess as much ontological reality as nitrogen or Napoleon: they are actors knotted into forms

of association that enlist our interest and help make things happen” (739). The portrait becomes knotted into the relationship and interactions between Dorian, Lord Henry, and Basil, and it does “make things happen.” A simple example is that it indirectly introduces Dorian to Lord Henry, an association which causes Dorian to curse the picture and assume a life of immorality without worrying about physical consequences, since those consequences only rear their ugly head on the portrait, not the man. Felski also discusses that anything whose existence makes a difference can be known as an actor, human or nonhuman, since actors do not exist on their own but rather as an everchanging network; this is a fundamental condition for action (738). With this in mind, the portrait is clearly an actor, a member of the network that exists in the novel. It’s interesting to note that none of the three main characters have any children of their own, so the portrait becomes some kind of offspring, or even an heir, to the three men, especially Dorian. For Dorian, viewing the portrait as an heir allows him to disinherit himself from his memories, emotions, beliefs, opinions, and especially consequences of action. As Christensen writes, “How these inheritances shape us greatly accounts for personality change and self-development, for good or ill” (167). Once Dorian feels he can pass any unpleasant emotions on to his hidden portrait, he frees himself to enjoy the immoral pleasures of life with little-to-no outward physical or emotional consequences.

Basil’s portrait of Dorian reveals a convergence of the relationship and the triangle of desire that exists between Basil, Dorian, and Lord Henry. At the outset of the novel, Lord Henry asks why Basil won’t exhibit his masterpiece, the portrait of Dorian, to which Basil remarks that it reveals something of his artistic idolatry of Dorian: “He shall never know anything about it. But the world might guess it; and I will not bare my soul to their shallow, prying eyes ... There is too much of myself in the thing, Harry—too much of myself!” (Wilde, 14). Therefore, not

only is the portrait a representation of Dorian's youth and beauty, but it is also a representation of the love that Basil feels for Dorian. It holds Basil's innermost feelings for Dorian, and even his "soul," which is ironic seeing as the painting later holds Dorian's decrepit soul as well.

There is also the mark of Lord Henry's influence on Dorian in the portrait. As Basil is painting, he sees a change coming over Dorian: "... the painter, deep in his work, and conscious only that a look had come into the lad's face that he had never seen there before" (Wilde, 19). Therefore, Dorian's youthful beauty, Basil's love, and Lord Henry's influence all converge in the creation of the portrait. "Thus the portrait of Dorian Gray, perceived or recognized as a mimetic representation, a likeness, of its subject, is in fact the product of 'influence,' that is not a copying, not a doubling. Produced by all three men who leave their traces on it, the portrait is the site where their intersubjective relations (of influence and desire) are inscribed" (Ginsburg, 100-01). These qualities are present in the finished portrait, which Dorian wishes to switch with. This begs the question: When Dorian switches places with the portrait, does he become, as the portrait was, the convergence of the influences and desires of himself, Lord Henry, and Basil? According to ANT, the answer is likely yes. Latour writes, "The project of ANT is simply to extend the list and modify the shapes and figures of those assembled as participants and to design a way to make them act as a durable whole" (72). In other words, the three men's desires and influence were woven together in the portrait which then switched places with Dorian. Thus, Dorian in his human form walks free for the rest of the novel, full of these desires and influences plus the knowledge of his true soul, hidden away, reaping the consequences of his actions. Lord Henry himself ponders the subject of influence: "There was something terribly enthralling in the exercise of influence ... To project one's soul into some gracious form, and let it tarry there for a moment" (Wilde, 34). The irony, of course is that Lord Henry's influence on Dorian lasts nearly

the entire course of the novel, and Dorian's soul actually was projected onto a "gracious form," the once-beautiful painting that grows uglier with each immoral act he commits.

Actor-network theory actually has much to say about the three men and their influence on the portrait, and its subsequent influence on them. Jason Maxwell writes on nonhuman actors as parts of networks: "Actors derive their composition through their actions, actions that are necessarily connected to other actors in their network. Indeed, the network simply amounts to the sum total of interactions among its participants, both human and nonhuman. Without these interactions, the network effectively ceases to exist, becoming an altogether different network of associations" (162). If any character, including the portrait, was missing from Wilde's novel or did not act a certain way toward the other characters, then the whole story would be different. If Basil didn't choose Dorian as his muse, there would be no portrait. If Dorian didn't realize his youthful beauty and wish to switch places with the portrait, then his age and sin would show on his face and he would not be able to hide it. If Lord Henry didn't meet and begin to exert his influence on Dorian, there would be no sinning.

Edwin Sayes is another writer influenced by Latour, who focused on nonhuman actors. According to Sayes, "the term 'nonhuman' is intended to signal dissatisfaction with the philosophical tradition in which an object is automatically placed opposite a subject, and the two are treated as radically different" (136). This is important to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* because the portrait should not be treated as an opposite to the human Dorian. Dorian switched places with the portrait, so that he, like a portrait would, remains youthfully handsome, while the portrait displays age and the ruination of Dorian's soul through immoral acts and hedonism. Mike Michael, in his book *Actor-Network Theory: Trials, Trails and Translations*, also discusses the role of the nonhuman in that it often can shape the inter-relations amongst human actors (17),

which is what happens within the Dorian-Lord Henry-Basil triangle. Further, Michael writes on the work of Michel Serres, an older contemporary of ANT's early pioneers, who compared the role of nonhuman actors to Hermes, the not-always-reliable messenger of the gods. "Hermes conveys messages, but sometimes they do not arrive in the same form or with the same content as when they were sent, and the relationships they were meant to mediate do not always turn out as intended ... The immediate point is that though these messengers—message-bearers—take many disparate forms, they are themselves also the products of message-bearers" (Michael, 19-20). This relates to the portrait of Dorian, because the portrait holds Basil's feelings for Dorian, but Dorian does not receive this message initially. The portrait as a mediator between the three men does not function as they initially intended, not least of all because Dorian stows it away in an upper room once he catches wind of what the curse has done to the portrait. On this point, Latour writes that although nonhuman actors tend to recede into the background, "It does not mean they stop acting, but that their mode of action is no longer *visibly connected* to the usual social ties" (80). This is especially relevant for the portrait: hidden away by Dorian but still very much a part of the action in that it is present in Dorian's mind, and he checks the damage to it almost always after committing each new sin and even revels in the change. Dorian keeps his scarred soul in a remote room, "the room that was to keep for him the curious secret of his life and hide his soul from the eyes of men" (Wilde, 101). Even though Dorian's "secret" is not always in sight, it is never far from his mind, no matter how hidden he believes it to be.

ANT has origins and connections to scientific fields of study, and José Huguenin and Gisele Wolkoff embarked on an interesting study to explicate the ties between *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and physics, which is relevant to a discussion of this novel and ANT. Huguenin and Wolkoff discuss the importance of exploring relations between different fields of knowledge,

reflecting on the dialogue between art and science (82), which is something that Latour and his contemporaries embark on when applying actor-network theory to literature and art. Huguenin and Wolkoff note the ways in which the scientific Many Worlds Interpretation (MWI) can be seen in and applied to Wilde's novel. "The Quantum Mechanic's measurement postulate tells us that the state of a given system collapses into the measured corresponding result. Parallel worlds, then, collapse into a single world. How can the MWI be seen in the novel? Dorian Gray lives in two parallel worlds: the one in which Dorian Gray remains young and the world where the picture ages. When Dorian Gray destroys the picture, the two parallel worlds collapse into one where Dorian Gray is old. The superposition between the two worlds (Dorian Gray young/picture aging), therefore, gets destroyed" (89-90). The ending of the novel does make clear the dangers of living with a soul in two parts, or a body separate from a soul, reminiscent of JK Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, in which the villainous Lord Voldemort splits his soul into many parts, only to become weaker as each part is destroyed. This is relevant to the ending of the novel, in which destroying the painting is equivalent to Dorian destroying his soul and himself. In his exploration of doubling in this novel, Christopher Craft writes of Dorian as a "divided figure of self and same," (113) in that he has tied his sense of self to the beauty he originally saw in the portrait, and through the switch, he has lost his soul and the sense of who he actually is. Instead, he spirals into murder and madness under the influence of Lord Henry and through the aspect of not having to see physical implications of his aging and wrongdoings.

The ending is extremely telling of the dangers of living life split in two, but first it is important to further explore this idea of doubling, or mimesis. Nidesh Lawtoo examines the mimesis at play in Wilde's novel, noting Dorian's awareness of his sins on full display in the transformation of the portrait: "On the one hand, despite its anti-realistic status, the decaying

picture continues to represent faithfully, or mirror-like, the moral decay of the protagonist's soul. On the other hand, Dorian adds a mirroring device to the (anti-)mimetic picture, enhancing the dynamic interplay between the visual reflection and the bodily horror constitutive of his double life” (222). The entire novel explores real and not real, double lives, and inner versus outer lives. The most obvious example is the hidden-away portrait, but this idea of doubling can be applied to Dorian’s spurned lover, Sibyl Vane. Dorian loved her for her acting abilities, but scorned her when she lost those abilities. The cruel irony is that the reason Sibyl loses her abilities is because once she experiences what she believes to be real love with Dorian, she feels she can no longer pretend to love when on stage. After Dorian cruelly breaks up with her, the selfish act that brings on the first change in the portrait, she kills herself. He laments this to Lord Henry, who tells Dorian to be sad for the characters she played on stage, but not for Sibyl herself: “don’t waste your tears over Sibyl Vane. She was less real than they are” (87). This marking of Sibyl as separate from the characters she played brings to mind the relationship between Dorian and the portrait: which one is real and which one is a character, an act? Craft also writes about the doubling quality in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Craft compares the character of Dorian Gray to Narcissus, because of the existence of: “an insanity that consists in the lover’s attachment not at all to ‘himself,’ but rather to the visual image that discloses the self to itself as the alienated object of its own desire. This is a commitment that ... graduates fully unto death” (Craft, 113). Craft writes that unlike in Ovid’s Narcissus story, in which Ovid employs natural speculum, Wilde uses “an artificial and supernatural one ... Dorian’s portrait confers visibility upon an internal corruption that otherwise escapes sensory apprehension” (114). In other words, the representation of Dorian’s wrongdoing is on a manmade canvas, painted by his once-friend

Basil, and stowed away where no one can see or know of his sin-crippled soul. That is, until he runs into Basil, who asks to see the portrait that he created.

Toward the end of the novel, Dorian runs into Basil, who has heard terrible things about Dorian's immoral acts, and wishes to know if these evils are true. Dorian eventually agrees to show Basil the portrait, hidden away in a back room, remarking: "So you think that it is only God who sees the soul, Basil? Draw that curtain back, and you will see mine" (Wilde, 130). Basil is horror-stricken by the hideousness of the painting, no longer beautiful but aged and ugly. Dorian tells Basil the story of the influences on him that led to the misfortunes faced throughout the novel: "you met me, flattered me, and taught me to be vain of my good looks. One day you introduced me to a friend of yours, who explained to me the wonder of youth, and you finished a portrait of me that revealed to me the wonder of beauty. In a mad moment, that, even now, I don't know whether I regret or not, I made a wish, perhaps you would call it a prayer..." (Wilde, 131). It is here that Dorian reveals his awareness of the influences by both Basil and Lord Henry, influences which caused him to become vain and treasure his youth, and therefore caused him to initiate the curse. As Lawtoo writes, "The novel triangulates influences between the gay artist, the aesthetic model, and the decadent dandy that destabilize the main conceptual polarities which, at first sight, appear to simply oppose aesthetics to morality, art to life, truth to lies, materialism to idealism, good to evil, etc." (217). It is in this moment, showing the ruined portrait to its original creator, that Dorian realizes all the ways he has been influenced and how the portrait has been at the center of it all. But, instead of repenting, as Basil begs him to do, Dorian kills his former friend instead, and then blackmails someone to dispose of the body. Although he has realized the evils of influence, he is not quite ready to give up the immoral, careless life he is living. Before his death, Basil is able to see what became of his once-coveted

masterpiece. “This is a decisive turning point in which the painter realizes that a mimetic inversion of perspectives has taken place” (Lawtoo, 221). Basil is the only character besides Dorian to have his eyes opened to the doubling of Dorian’s soul, or the transplantation of his soul onto Basil’s own artwork. The portrait was once a site of Basil’s secret love, but Dorian grasped an opportunity to switch places with it. The sad irony is that both men thought the portrait held a similar secret for the other, even though their secrets didn’t quite align: Dorian’s secret is his wish to switch places with the portrait and remain beautiful, while Basil’s secret is that the portrait reflects the hidden love he feels for Dorian (Ginsburg, 99). In this scene the portrait is clearly an actor; the sight of its ruination causes Basil great pain and it causes Dorian to lash out at the artist rather than choose to repent and try to make things right.

In reference to the portrait, Dorian says, “I was wrong. It has destroyed me” (131). This fact certainly rings true for the end of the novel. Dorian feels paranoid of being found out for the various murders and moral crimes he has committed throughout the novel. He ruminates over the picture as evidence of his crime, because it wears the marks of guilty conscience. Once Dorian recognizes the portrait in this way, he realizes that he needs to destroy it, and in doing so he may destroy the nagging feelings of guilt that plague him: “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, 183). This line of thinking shows that although the portrait itself had been hidden away for much of the plot, it was never far from Dorian’s mind. Even though the picture did not necessarily exert agency like one might think an actor in a network should do, the simple existence of it within Dorian’s inner network caused him to ponder feelings of guilt he believed that he had pushed away. Sayes discusses ANT in its attempt to pluralize what it means to speak of agency: “Thus understood, ANT adopts a

complicated but nonetheless minimal conception of agency. It is minimal because it catches every entity that makes or promotes a difference in another entity or in a network” (141). In other words, within the study of ANT, agency can be decoupled from intentionality, subjectivity, and free will. Therefore, although a painting obviously cannot exercise free will, this supernatural painting is a transcription of Dorian’s soul, and therefore it is an actor in influencing the plot as well as Dorian’s thoughts and actions.

Dorian recognizes the painting as the embodiment of his guilty conscience, a whole other character in itself. When he realizes this, it’s clear that both Dorian and the portrait cannot coexist, because Dorian can not continue living life without care while the embodiment of guilt in all its ugliness still exists within his own home. This goes along with the ANT notion presented by Sayes: “we should not be concerned with whether nonhumans are understood to possess the ability to make moral or immoral decisions - this is not suggested. Rather, what is elided and made impossible is the question of responsibility - of which individuals and groups should be held accountable” (140). In other words, morality can’t be linked to nonhumans as separate from other actors, but it should be linked to associations. Thus, the painting itself was made hideous based on the immoral actions of Dorian. The painting did not make the decisions, Dorian did, but due to his cursed wish the painting was the thing outwardly changed. Interestingly, Sayes also writes that, “Simply put, nonhumans do not have agency *by themselves*, if only because they are *never* by themselves” (144). This point is intriguing in the context of the novel because once Dorian stashes the work in a secluded room, it is technically by itself save for when he visits it or when he shows the damage to Basil. But, it is hard to untangle Dorian the person from Dorian the portrait since his soul his so intertwined with the artwork by the end of the novel. So, the portrait as a nonhuman actor is never actually by itself, since part of Dorian

exists within it from the moment that he makes the wish to switch places with it. As Ginsburg writes, “he sees in it the power of his beauty and youth. It is this power that he desires to preserve through his wish to exchange place with the portrait ... Dorian’s influence over others throughout his life demonstrates the power of the image he has become through this exchange” (103). In other words, Dorian’s influence on others following the curse on the portrait shows the way in which he has truly become the embodiment of youth and beauty that he, Basil, and Lord Henry marveled over at the beginning of the novel. Latour writes of continuity of influence as not just consisting of human to human or object to object connections, but rather it “zig-zags” from one to the other (75). In this way, Dorian the person embodies the influence of Dorian the portrait, influencing others as though he were a painting, not a person. At the same time, his knowledge of the increasingly decrepit painting stowed away in a hidden room drives his descent into madness, murderous rage, and eventually suicide.

Maxwell writes of ANT as the notion of a series of continually shifting hybrids or networks, weaving humans and nonhumans without clear distinction (161). The portrait sharing a piece of Dorian, his very soul, allows for the intermingling of the human and nonhuman in the network present in this novel. Craft writes that, “[the portrait] turns Dorian inside out so his eyes may witness what, by definition, they cannot see at all—the legible condition of his inner being” (114-15). The portrait, to Dorian, is like a mirror into his darkest inner-soul, a mirror that he chooses to ignore for most of the novel until he simply cannot shirk the guilt it’s causing him. Once Dorian recognizes the portrait, like Basil, as disrupting the flow of his network, causing him to feel guilt, paranoia, and distress, the only logical option in his mind is to destroy it. It’s as though he believes destroying the thing that is disrupting his network will allow him smooth sailing in his hedonistic ways. This is what causes him to take the knife that was ironically used

by him to murder Basil, and attempt to destroy the portrait itself. “As it had killed the painter, so it would kill the painter’s work, and all that that meant. It would kill the past, and when that was dead he would be free” (Wilde, 183). Because the portrait was heir to the consequences of his past actions, Dorian mistakenly assumes that if he destroys the portrait, the consequences would be destroyed as well. What he fails to recognize is that his switch with the painting was not just in appearance alone; Dorian is still heir to his own past. In the *Harry Potter* series, when Voldemort’s last Horcrux is destroyed, Voldemort’s soul and personage is destroyed as well. In the same way, Dorian’s destruction of the thing holding his soul kills the last shred of humanity he had left. Throughout his hedonistic life, Dorian had not actually been a human; rather he was a walking, talking portrait: beautiful to the eye but with no substance. His ailing humanity was locked away in a secret room, imprisoned within Basil’s painting. Thus, stabbing the painting is equivalent to Dorian stabbing himself. It’s also interesting to note that Dorian believed he was simply destroying “the painter’s work,” as if he was unaware it had become so much more than an inanimate object throughout the course of the novel. As Ginsburg notes, “He kills himself with the same knife he used to kill Basil, thus murdering the murderer, repeating/paying for that murder” (108). For an ANT perspective on this, Latour writes that objects can become mediators during major events like “actions, breakdowns, and strikes” (81).

Through Dorian’s final act of stabbing the painting, the painting becomes a mediator, switching places with Dorian so that it is himself that he kills. Through this act of murder-suicide, the body and soul once again reunite. In Kerry Powell’s and Peter Raby’s *Oscar Wilde in Context*, they note this unification of the body and soul at the end of the novel: “the novel paints the ugliness of soul as well as of body, suggesting the way in which a more reflective aesthetic judgement can be a means to attaining virtue. Dorian’s final attack on his portrait is

spurred by an aesthetic judgement ... the visible ugliness of vice in the sinful soul repels the hedonist” (266). In other words, as long as the ugliness of sin was out of sight, out of mind for the hedonistic Dorian, he was content in continuing to live that way. Once he is forced to reconcile the image of the hideous, aged portrait being the image of his own soul, his vainness causes him to feel the need to destroy it. This final act of destruction is what reunites Dorian’s body with his soul, but it is not a happy reunion. The body of Dorian is found, unrecognizably old and hideous, stabbed in the heart, while his portrait is back to its original youthful beauty. In this way, the portrait as nonhuman actor, with agency only as was projected upon it by the cursed switch, facilitates the rise and fall of Dorian Gray. As Dorian himself says, “There is something fatal about a portrait. It has a life of its own” (Wilde, 97).

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