

Summer 8-2014

The Queer Gothic Hero's Journey in Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray

Kyle Leon Ethridge
University of Southern Mississippi

Follow this and additional works at: https://aquila.usm.edu/masters_theses



Part of the [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ethridge, Kyle Leon, "The Queer Gothic Hero's Journey in Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray" (2014).
Master's Theses. 48.

https://aquila.usm.edu/masters_theses/48

This Masters Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by The Aquila Digital Community. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of The Aquila Digital Community. For more information, please contact Joshua.Cromwell@usm.edu.

The University of Southern Mississippi

THE QUEER GOTHIC HERO'S JOURNEY IN OSCAR WILDE'S

THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

by

Kyle Leon Ethridge

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts

Approved:

Dr. Alexandra Valint
Committee Chair

Dr. Martina Sciolino

Dr. Eric Tribunella

Dr. Maureen Ryan
Dean of the Graduate School

August 2014

ABSTRACT

THE QUEER GOTHIC HERO'S JOURNEY IN OSCAR WILDE'S

THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

by Kyle Leon Ethridge

August 2014

This study of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* argues that the novel participates in a Gothic subversion of the archetypal hero's journey. The novel employs Gothic devices to supplant heroic narremes. As the novel progresses, both Dorian (as a type of hero-character) and the narrative repeatedly deny or subvert the normative idea of heroism later reified in Joseph Campbell's archetypal theory. While Campbell's hero attempts to secure and universalize a heterosocial story, Wilde's hero is recuperated through a reconfiguring of normative failure as queer success. What is ostensibly a failure of the normative hero to achieve his quest is actually the queer Gothic hero's interrogation of Victorian London and its conception of heroism along untenable gender norms.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis adviser, Dr. Alexandra Valint, for her tireless efforts in leading me through this process. Her guidance was invaluable in shaping this project. Also, Drs. Eric Tribunella and Martina Sciolino helped to further refine this thesis and to provide excellent ideas for revising and expanding the original project. Further, Dr. Monika Gehlawat's support in writing and honing my argument is no less valuable. Of course, this endeavor would not have been possible without the constant support and input from my friends and family. I am grateful for all the support throughout this journey.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS iii

CHAPTER

 I. INTRODUCTION 1

 II. METHODOLOGY 6

 III. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS 13

 Urban Gothic London
 Departure
 Initiation
 Failed Return

 IV. CONCLUSION 32

WORKS CITED 36

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Critics often claim that Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) represents the emergence of the homosexual identity in Victorian London. This position, however, overlooks the correlative queerness of the novel's Gothic narrative. Though the term "queer" commonly denotes a non-heteronormative sexual orientation, I define it more as a subversive social and narrative mode in my reading of *Dorian Gray*.¹ I adopt Richard Zeikowitz's more expansive definition of queer, which he says can, among other things, "signify any non-normative behavior, relationship, or identity occurring at a specific moment" (67). My discussion of queerness focuses on how *Dorian Gray*'s narrative deviates from the hero's journey as Joseph Campbell develops it in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949).²

My use of queerness as an analytic category in this reading focuses not so much on issues of sexuality or gender performance as much as on issues of narrative queerness—deviance from the normative hero's journey but specifically with a queer sexual intentionality to it. I mean that Dorian's performance of queer sexual and gender roles reinforces the narrative's departure from the normative hero's journey. I choose to use "queer" rather than just "deviant" because it points to both Dorian's sexual queerness as well as the novel's narrative queerness as defined previously. In Wilde's novel, the

¹ Since "queer" works in oppositional terms, I define queer sexuality, in addition to Zeikowitz's definition, as non-normative sexual or gender orientations or performances. Taking a lover of the same sex, performing gender roles in contrast to the

² I use Joseph Campbell since his text is considered the authority on the hero's journey as a narrative structure. I acknowledge the apparent anachronism between Campbell and Wilde.

Gothic narrative works on a structural level to subvert the traditional hero's journey, and this subversion occurs through both the Gothic narrative mode and the Gothic's inherent queerness. I argue that the Gothic narrative present in *Dorian Gray* precludes the chance of normative heroism as Campbell imagines it while the Gothic's inherent queerness allows for a new type of hero to emerge from the ruin of the novel.

Dorian Gray preceded the landmark Wilde Trials of 1895 in which the Marquess of Queensberry accused Wilde of sodomy, and the ensuing litigation caused London to examine the possible criminality and morality of a burgeoning homosexual identity. Antonio Sanna says that during this time “[homosexuals] became a judicial subject of law, a problem for morality and . . . a target of law and of public opinions” (22). Indeed, Wilde was already grappling with this identity when he wrote and published his text five years earlier. *Dorian Gray* required society to adjust its understanding of sexuality. I suggest that the novel participates in this reevaluation through its depiction of queerness realized in deviant heroism. In this context, then, the novel interrogates Victorian London's heteronormative hero through the performance of queer subjectivity.

The novel itself covers various themes: morality, the role of art in society, the study of aesthetics, and homosexuality. Despite these themes, most reviewers took issue with, as Michael Gillespie notes, “the morality issue” and the novel's depictions of “male friendship that stressed inadmissible homosexual attitudes” (“Reviews” 355).³ A review of the novel in the *Daily Chronicle* claims that *Dorian Gray* “is a tale spawned from the

³ Gillespie gives deeper attention to the reception of the novel in *The Picture of Dorian Gray: “What the World Thinks Me”* and in the “Reviews and Reactions” portion of the Norton edition.

leprous literature of the French *Decadents* – a poisonous book, the atmosphere of which is heavy with the mephitic odours of moral and spiritual putrefaction” (qtd. in “Reviews” 23). Ed Cohen further examines the issue of subversion in *Dorian Gray*. After Wilde’s revision and subsequent expansion of the original short story, little overt homosexuality remains in the novel, and even then, the implicit homosexuality that remains is ambiguous at best. Cohen argues that the queerness of *Dorian Gray* can “resist the dominant heterosexual ideologies” (803). Indeed, I agree that this novel opposes the dominant and critiques normative societal ideologies through its Gothic and queer narrative deviance. Despite Wilde’s belief that art should not intervene in society but be solely an aesthetic object, the novel enters into the discourse of heroism.⁴ As such, *Dorian Gray* creates a new category of hero: the queer Gothic hero, a figure that expands the understanding of heroism and the heroic character.

In the language of Joseph Campbell, Dorian’s journey begins in Basil’s garden and art studio where, prompted by Lord Henry, Dorian begins his quest to obtain eternal youth. Dorian overcomes Basil, the threshold guardian, and obtains the portrait—the supernatural object of power. Moving from the edenic garden, Dorian ventures into urban Gothic London where his trials begin. Faced with both mental and physical temptations, Dorian becomes more morally degenerate because of his increased freedom to sin.

⁴ Though I do not use Thomas Carlyle’s theories about the hero, he helped to develop heroism in the Victorian era specifically. Delivered in 1840 in conjunction with James Fraser, his series of lectures developed various figures of heroism as they were most relevant to that society. He describes the “Great Man” as “the light which enlightens, which has enlightened the darkness of the world; and this not as a kindled lamp only, but rather as natural luminary shining by the gift of Heaven; a flowing light fountain, as I say, of native original insight, of manhood and heroic nobleness” (qtd. in Lehman 45). See Carlyle’s lectures or Benjamin Lehman’s *Carlyle’s Theory of the Hero* for more information.

Figuratively, he descends into the underworld of London, thereby fulfilling Campbell's descent into the underworld. Dorian's trials consist of moral conflicts with himself, a failed romance with Sibyl Vane, and the final conflict with Basil. Where the hero would normally emerge from his quest with the object of power, Dorian fails and remains in the underworld of the journey, and, unable to move past his conscience, he dies, thus ending the journey.

Many of the novel's narremes correspond to Campbell's hero's journey. In this analysis, I use narreme to refer to the smallest unit of narrative, much like a phoneme or morpheme.⁵ Using classical myths and legends to construct the archetypal hero and the hero's journey, Campbell asserts that given the timelessness of myth and legend, the stories of those heroes can be found in the stories of many contemporary characters. Though Campbell's text deals with a very broad view of the hero's journey, I am more concerned with the core of the hero journey: departure, initiation, and return. In Campbell's theory, the hero character closely follows this structure. I use his ideas to define the normative hero narrative so as to contrast it with *Dorian Gray's* unique hero narrative.

Little has been done to determine the nature of Dorian as a hero—or if he even is one. Critics often label Dorian a tragic hero due to his death, and some view him as the

⁵ See Eugene Dorfman's *The Narreme in the Medieval Romance Epic: An Introduction to Narrative Structures* for a discussion of narremes.

villain in this novel.⁶ Indeed, Henry Alley casts Basil as the tragic hero and Dorian as the villain. However, I resist casting Dorian as the villain since villains typically have an ulterior motive to disrupt society on a more fundamental level—or at least seek to destroy society for the sake of destroying it. Villains seem to exhibit an evil intentionality that usually causes critics or readers to view them in a negative light. As I argue later, Dorian’s heroism develops in his failure, not in his characterization as a morally corrupt character. Dorian’s character is indeed complicated. Contemporary criticism claims that he is a dandy (Glick 134), and Halberstam calls him a monster and a fop (*Skin* 63). Further, a review of the original story calls him a devil (Mason qtd. in Cohen 802). These categories, however, are at odds with the hero archetype. Nevertheless, some critics erroneously or ambiguously call Dorian a hero. A review of the novel in the *Scots Observer* says that the novel’s “hero is a devil” (Mason qtd. in Cohen 802). Further, Elisa Glick claims, “Wilde situates his hero not outside the public sphere, but in the dialectical relation between public and private...” (134). Glick’s terminology confuses the distinction between hero and mere protagonist. A protagonist is simply the main or central character in a narrative, and the hero character, while usually the protagonist, follows a certain narrative pattern. Even when critics call Dorian a hero, a sufficient analysis of Dorian as a hero of any kind seems lacking from criticism.

⁶ Dorian certainly follows Aristotle’s ideas of the tragedy and tragic hero outlined in *Poetics*. His *hamartia*, for example, is arguably his vanity. However, I am more concerned with Dorian’s development as a hero in relation to Campbell than Aristotle.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

This paper is divided into three main sections. In the first, I discuss the nature of the Gothic narrative and its inherent queerness since it is through the Gothic that *Dorian Gray* initially denies traditional heroism. Then, I move into the relationship between Campbell's text and Wilde's novel. After exploring how Dorian's journey and the classic hero's journey interact with one another and how those interactions affect our understanding of the novel, I use Dorian's death as an example of queer failure, which reimagines normative success. After dealing with these issues, I transition into the larger stakes of my reading of this novel: its depiction of queer Gothic heroism in relation to normative heroism.

The Gothic seeks to disrupt extant ideologies and understandings. From those disruptions, criticisms of dominant cultural and social ideologies arise. Peter Garrett says that the "Gothic clearly aims to disturb its readers, and the disturbance it produces can be cognitive or ideological as well as affective, but it is always accompanied by a strong concern for control" (2). In *Dorian Gray*, the Gothic seeks not only to disturb the reader on an affective level, but I assert that it also disturbs readers' understandings of the hero and its narrative. In *Victorian Demons*, Andrew Smith claims, "Wilde is prepared to rewrite certain pre-existing narratives in order to develop his theory of identity politics" (152). Certainly, this tendency to rewrite is evident in *Dorian Gray* as it interacts with Campbell's hero's journey. Wilde's novel rewrites the hero narrative and deconstructs the hero figure so as to expand its definition.

In addition to the tragic hero, Dorian's version of heroism most closely resembles the antihero in the form of the Byronic hero, but he diverges from this figure in two significant ways: his queer sexuality and gender and his failure to complete the hero's quest. Broadly, Dorian is an antihero in that his character, as M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Harpham say, "is widely discrepant from that of the traditional protagonist, or *hero*" (14). They continue, "Instead of manifesting largeness, dignity, power, or heroism, the antihero is petty, ignominious, passive, clownish, or dishonest" (14-15). Though Dorian certainly does not fit the traditional hero mold, he is not exactly an antihero as he is rather active and charismatic. As such, Dorian most nearly resembles the Byronic hero, a type of antihero and a figure which Kip Wheeler says "defies authority and conventional morality, and becomes paradoxically ennobled by his peculiar rejection of virtue" and is "associated with destructive passions, sometimes selfish brooding or indulgence in personal pains, alienation from their communities, persistent loneliness, intense introspection, and fiery rebellion" ("Byronic Hero"). In contrast to the heteronormativity of Victorian London, Dorian's queerness defies authority regarding normative sexuality, and the Byronic hero and Dorian share a passion for immoral behavior. The Byronic hero generally exhibits normative desire towards an object of the historically appropriate gender and sex.⁷ However, Dorian differs from this figure largely because he is queer, an identity that disrupts Campbell's structure, and by failing to complete his journey in relation to Campbell. Dorian's queerness has a distinct critical and ethical thrust to it that the Byronic hero seems to lack and that the traditional hero denies altogether.

⁷ I say "generally" because the Byronic hero is neither typically categorized as a queer character nor is it defined by its potential queerness. Its namesake certainly exhibited what could be a queer identity.

The queer Gothic hero most differs from Campbell's archetype in that there is a fundamental failure—not just death—involved in the quest. Specifically, his failure is a queer failure, a particular concept that Judith Halberstam explains in *The Queer Art of Failure*. In short, “The queer art of failure turns on the impossible, the improbable, the unlikely, and the unreachable. It quietly loses, and in losing it imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being” (*Queer* 88). As Dorian develops and his narrative ends, his heroism is predicated on a series of failures which are realized through narrative queerness in relation to the traditional hero's journey. For example, Dorian refuses traditional desire, and so he denies the narrative of the heroic marriage and fails to operate as an archetypal hero. Halberstam argues that “this resistance takes the form of investing in counterintuitive modes of knowing such as failure. . . . we might read *failure*, for example, as a refusal of mastery” (*Queer* 11). His refusal to perform normatively further distances him from the figure of the traditional hero. Given these factors, Dorian must be considered as a fundamentally different category of hero as he fails his journey in contrast to Campbell's construction of the hero and even the Byronic hero, who achieve their goals—or at least fail in the proper and normative ways. The queer Gothic hero appears at the intersection of queerness, failure, and heroism.

Only by interrogating the ideas of success and failure can Dorian's journey be fully realized. Instead of the return promised in Campbell's theory, I argue that the queer Gothic hero must ultimately die for the journey to be completed. In his death, however, he escapes and questions normativity. Halberstam fleshes out the idea of a queer failure and its relation to launching societal and political critiques. I quote her at length in order to set up the idea of queer failure as success. She says

the concept of “weapons of the weak” can be used to recategorize what looks like inaction, passivity, and lack of resistance in terms of the practice of stalling the business of the dominant. We can also recognize failure as a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline and as a form of critique. As a practice, failure recognizes that alternatives are embedded already in the dominant and that power is never total or consistent; indeed failure can exploit the unpredictability of ideology and its indeterminate qualities. (*Queer* 88)

In this paradigm, failure is victory as it challenges the norms of success, and *Dorian Gray* follows this logic in that it undermines preconceived ideas of heroism and success in the Victorian period. Indeed, the novel seems to be framed by types of failure: Sanna gestures towards another type of failure that the novel uses and argues that the novel develops “an implicit queer rhetorical strategy intended to counter the late-Victorian medical discourses legitimated by (and legitimating) a male- and hetero-dominant legislation” (37). Not overtly addressing homosexuality allows the novel to avoid the critical eye in some instances. Similarly, Dorian’s death, often seen as a heroic failure to achieve full hedonism, paradoxically and passively works against normative expectations placed on the hero.

Expectations of traditional heroic success are denied or reversed in *Dorian Gray*. However, success can be found in this novel if Dorian’s failure is redefined through a queer lens. As a challenge to normative lifestyles, queer lives (and by extension queer narratives) question the ideas of success and failure. Similarly, reading this novel as a success reveals more about Dorian’s failure than is initially apparent. In having Dorian

fail, the novel interrogates Victorian London's stance towards heroism and deviance. As a sort of martyr for his cause, Dorian emblemizes the struggle of a queer subject in a society that deals harshly with non-normative subjects.

Whereas normal narrative modes seek to edify the hero, the Gothic undoes the hero and denies him heroic character growth. Nils Clausson explains the power of the Gothic narrative to preclude positive character growth in his reading of the novel, claiming that *Dorian Gray* is a *bildungsroman*, a novel of development and maturation (339). However, the Gothic opposes the *bildungsroman* since the former undercuts the growth that the latter desires. Clausson says, "the Gothic plot in *Dorian Gray*, then, is the typical plot of *fin-de-siècle* Gothic—degeneration from a higher to a lower state" (357). Indeed, this tendency of the Gothic to cause decay rather than growth poses a problem to Dorian's heroism in the first place: how can the hero survive in such a hostile narrative? Clausson's recognition of this Gothic tendency reveals the importance of the seemingly unstable narrative modes in this novel.

The queerness of the Gothic furthers its ability to subvert and critique. William Hughes and Andrew Smith claim that "Gothic has, in a sense, always been queer" since the Gothic is "poised astride the uneasy cultural boundary that separates the acceptable and familiar from the troubling and different" (1). Both Gothic and queer narrative modes seek to critique and interrogate conceived notions of society, advancement, progress, and normativity, and the Gothic achieves this end through subversion. To clarify, the Gothic and the queer flow in and out of one another, but they are not exactly synonymous. The Gothic generally has a connection to queerness, but the queer is not always Gothic. When using "Gothic," I deploy the energies of that narrative to disrupt and destabilize, while I

use “queer” to focus more on sexual deviance or non-normative sexualities. Relevant to this analysis is the traditional hero’s journey, but we can also see these similar queer Gothic narrative subversions happening in the marriage plot of *Jane Eyre*, the family romance in *Castle of Otranto*, and the *bildungsroman* in *Frankenstein*. The Gothic’s queerness critiques through deviance: showing alternatives to the norm allows for the norm to be disassembled and thus questioned.

Though Dorian is not a traditional hero, his own heroic development relies on Campbell’s definition. Quoting Campbell, Sandra DeMers describes the normative hero as

any male or female who leaves the world of his or her everyday life to undergo a journey to a special world where challenges and fears are overcome in order to secure a reward (special knowledge, healing potion, etc.) which is then shared with other members of the hero’s community.

(Campbell qtd. in DeMers par. 1)

On the surface, Dorian lines up with these characteristics. He leaves the normal world and ventures from Basil’s safe garden into the dark, urban Gothic, the figurative supernatural underworld of the novel, where he effectively secures his special knowledge: that the portrait preserves his youth by collecting and manifesting his own sins. However, the Gothic narrative twists the narremes and ultimately denies Dorian his reward and the chance to share his new knowledge with the community. Further, Campbell develops his hero as one whose “visions, ideas, and inspirations come pristine from the primary springs of human life and thought” (14). Dorian’s focus on youth as “the only thing worth having” does not come from the same pristine springs (Wilde 28).

His motivations come from the fear of getting older and thus losing his youthful good looks, so vanity, his tragic flaw, is the impetus of his journey. Though it is not necessary for the queer Gothic hero to be blameless, Dorian's motivations and actions mark him as too different to fit Campbell's idea of the hero.

CHAPTER III
TEXTUAL ANALYSIS
Urban Gothic London

The traditional hero's journey requires a natural landscape for the creation of the hero, and numerous heroes in classical myths commune with avatars of nature to gain their blessing.⁸ Campbell says that "for a culture still nursed in mythology the landscape, as well as every phase of human existence, is made alive with symbolic suggestion" (34). Victorian London lacks the lush landscapes of many classic myths, and this absence denies Dorian any sort of symbolic restoration through nature that is commonly afforded to heroes. For example, the Lady of the Lake in Arthurian legend blesses the journey by giving Arthur Excalibur, yet Dorian lacks that component in his story. Furthering this idea, Campbell says, "Mother Nature herself supports the mighty task" of the hero (59). For Dorian, this mighty task is the preservation of his youth, which is inherently unnatural. Yet, Mother Nature is effectively absent in this novel. At least, she is not productively present in that nature is not effective in its symbolic, restorative role. In her absence, the sprawling city rises up.

Only the novel's opening chapters, which take place in Basil's art studio and adjoining garden, create any positive sense of nature. With the "rich odour of roses" and "the heavy scent of the lilac," Basil's garden affords Dorian purity or innocence—in essence, protection (Wilde 1). Mother Nature, represented by the flowers, is present, but Dorian moves from the garden and into London rather quickly. He does, however, meet nature again outside of Basil's garden in his country home, where he "[strolls] through

⁸ Odysseus has Aeolus, Gilgamesh has Shamash, etc.

the gaunt cold picture-gallery” (137). Here, the power of nature is nullified by Gothic narrative. Dorian reflects on the pictures of his cursed family and wonders if his “very flesh was tainted with the monstrous maladies of the dead” (137). Rather than offering freedom or peace, his country home forces him to think about his own sins and monstrous history. In keeping with Clausson’s conclusions about the Gothic’s ability to deny development, nature is emptied of her power to nurture Dorian properly. The country home should be a retreat from the city, but it only haunts Dorian and makes him further consider his sins.

More specifically, *Dorian Gray* acts as an urban Gothic novel. Originally, Jamieson Ridenhour states, the Gothic existed in a pastoral form, removed from the city and its trappings (2). However, the industrial revolution moved the novel’s focus primarily to the city. This new urban setting carries with it inherent Gothic-ness that works against Dorian, and with the new setting comes a host of issues that the Gothic engages. Ridenhour asserts that one of the functions of the Gothic is to illustrate “the ignorant, violent past being subdued and banished by modernity” (9). The urban Gothic in *Dorian Gray* illustrates the conflict of progress and stagnation, of past and present. The urban strives toward positive growth, while the Gothic seeks to deny that impulse. Modernity fails to cast out evil at this point. However, the end of Dorian’s journey proves otherwise as Dorian, potentially representative of moral evil in London, is effectively banished.

London is described in the novel as intimidating and Gothic in its atmosphere. Before meeting Sibyl, Dorian describes London as having “an exquisite poison in the air” (48). Further, he says “I felt that this grey monstrous London of ours, with its myriads of

people, its sordid sinners, and its splendid sins, as you phrased it, must have something in store for me. I fancied a thousand things” (48). Sinful possibility abounds in this description. A proper hero would be repulsed by this monstrous city; Dorian, however, identifies with it and seeks to dive headlong into “its splendid sins.” London opposes the proper and virtuous living of a hero. It seems almost impossible for a heroically pure character to come out of such a morally degraded space, and Dorian cannot resist the temptation. Halberstam claims “the Gothic . . . inspires fear and desire at the same time” (*Skin* 13). Dorian desires the splendid sins, sordid sinners, and myriads of people in spite of the poisonous air of the city. Since Dorian’s goal is to test the limits of his pleasure and to achieve eternal youth, London assists in this non-normative goal because it provides for the sinner—not the proper hero.

After falling out of love with Sibyl, Dorian’s perception of the city changes. The veneer falls away, and he sees the filth in it. Dorian leaves Sibyl and begins wandering the streets:

Where he went to he hardly knew. He remembered wandering through dimly-lit streets, past gaunt, black-shadowed archways and evil-looking houses. Women with hoarse voices and harsh laughter had called after him. Drunkards had reeled by, cursing and chattering to themselves like monstrous apes. He had seen grotesque children huddled upon door-steps, and heard shrieks and oaths from gloomy courts. (Wilde 86)

London, though dark, had some potential to it since it allowed for Dorian to sin as he pleases. Now, the black-shadowed archways hem in the thousand fancied things, and a sense of claustrophobia pervades this description. The Gothic seeps through and

foreshadows Dorian's degeneration: darkness, shadows, and evil characterize the city in this passage. Dorian sees the flaws and suffering that the urban Gothic setting contains and is troubled by them. The descriptors which the text uses to create this world are so dark that, focalized through Dorian, this image reveals the negative emotions that Dorian projects on the city. Specifically, the architecture gestures towards the old manses and hollowed ruins favored by the first Gothic authors.⁹ Compared to the first description, Dorian's second encounter with London reveals how troubling he finds the city that still drives him towards monstrosity and sin. Dorian is trapped in the Gothic city that once afforded him hedonistic opportunity and possibility.

This description also engages the critical capacity of the urban Gothic. Ridenhour says that Gothic narratives offer "commentary on disease, crime, sanitation, prostitution, and any other urban concern under consideration" (32). The women who call after Dorian can be seen as prostitutes as their calls are an advertisement of their sexual wares and a solicitation to come buy from them. Poverty, specifically that of orphans, can be seen in the grotesque children. Through monstrosity, the novel calls attention to the ills of the city. Little, if any, of the city is ever cast in a positive valence. This gothicization of London shows the power of the Gothic narrative to critique, and this instance indicates how the narremes work toward a critique of the hero's journey as well. In this subversion of the hero's journey, Wilde's novel critiques Campbell's structure in that it suggests that the domestic and local spheres are just as (if not more) dangerous than uncharted territory. Rather than going abroad to find and defeat danger like the traditional hero,

⁹ Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* utilizes the Gothic setting and atmosphere to great success. Mark Hennelly discusses the importance of Gothic architecture in "Framing the Gothic: From Pillar to Post-Structuralism."

Dorian must simply go down the street: the danger is at home and in his city rather than abroad and in dangerous, “uncivilized” regions. Dorian’s relationship to the hero’s journey is mediated by his relationship with the city.

The Gothic also works more locally to subvert the domestic sphere by profaning the home and hearth of myths. Campbell says, “where a hero has been born, . . . a temple is erected there to signify and inspire the miracle of perfect centeredness; for this is the place of the breakthrough into abundance” (35). Instead of creating of a holy space in which the character symbolically becomes a new creature, the novel creates a dark temple. Dorian’s old schoolroom functions as the novel’s “temple” and contains his portrait, the reflection of his own moral decay. Instead of housing a proper god or relic, the schoolroom stores a symbol of evil and vanity. Sanna comments on Dorian’s schoolroom, saying “this is a quiet room, where the portrayal of vice, the truth of sin and corruption of the soul, the image of aging and decadence cannot be exposed to the rest of society because it would reveal Dorian’s sins and cause the condemnation of contemporary law” (34). This room hides both Dorian’s portrait, perverting the temple of the home, and his criminality (i.e., crimes committed and possible homosexuality) from Victorian London and the systems that would seek to punish him

Departure

Now, I turn from setting to Campbell’s theory to provide a framework onto which I can map Wilde’s text. According to Campbell, these categories of departure, initiation, and return broadly chart the hero’s journey, and admittedly, he does account for slight deviations, saying

if one or another of the basic elements of the archetypal pattern is omitted from a given fairy tale, legend, ritual, or myth, it is bound to be somehow or another implied—and the omission itself can speak for the history and pathology of the example. (30)

Omissions are not entirely my concern. Rather, I am concerned with how the Gothic transforms the narremes of the traditional hero's journey into the unique queer Gothic hero's journey. In many ways, *Dorian Gray* is in conversation with the hero's narrative. Though some parts accord with Campbell's normative journey, much of it fully subverts the traditional journey.

Campbell breaks the larger category of departure into five discrete units, but I am concerned with three of them since their form in *Dorian Gray* stands in most relief to the normative hero's journey.¹⁰ I focus on the call to adventure, the mentor, and the threshold guardian. Dorian's quest begins in Basil's garden during their painting session when Lord Henry points Dorian in the direction of his journey, saying, "The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden to itself, with desire for what its monstrous laws have made monstrous and unlawful" (Wilde 21). Giving in to temptation starts the journey for Dorian. Normally, some higher calling, such as the safety of the community or of a loved one, begins the journey, but Dorian's journey is only for himself.

¹⁰ Nearly every part of Dorian's journey contrasts with the normative journey, but the narremes that I have chosen to discuss are the more obvious and subversive ones. They have the most to say about Gothic narrative's subversion of the normative hero's journey.

Henry's words produce anxiety in Dorian that drives him out of his comfort zone and into the external world that Campbell suggests awaits the hero. Dorian feels that he is not driven into "a new world, but rather another chaos" (Wilde 22). Indeed, this statement foreshadows the trials that he will face. In traditional hero journeys the new world connotes a certain level of danger and chaos, which are usually generative for the hero, but Dorian feels an anxiety about this transition. Lord Henry follows up his call to action with the stakes of the journey: "Yes, Mr. Gray, the gods have been good to you. But what the gods give they quickly take away. You have only a few years in which to live really, perfectly, and fully" (24). Henry suggests that to live properly is to live a life of youthful vigor and wanton pleasure. Though this life sounds good in theory, Lord Henry's proclivity for hedonism reveals a life contradictory to the chivalrous hero of classic myths.

Clausson speaks to the tensions of growth and decay that appear in the novel on a generic level, saying that Gothic can "create generic dissonances as the Gothic plot of degeneration takes over and eventually supersedes the incompatible Paterian plot of self-development and individual liberation" (343).¹¹ Silke-Maria Weineck historicizes Dorian's decay within the decadent movement, saying, "degeneration and decadence. . . imperil the enterprise of European culture as a whole" (38). In this instance, Dorian not only endangers himself and those in his immediate surroundings, but he also undermines the project of European culture. For society to be successful, Dorian should be morally

¹¹ By generic, I mean the Gothic genre and the conventions that constitute that genre. Character decay is often one of those conventions. See Anne Williams's *Art of Darkness* for a more comprehensive discussion of Gothic generic elements.

sound and thus become the hero of European expansion.¹² His deviance denies the expansion and thus undermines the social and political ideology of Victorian London.

According to Campbell, the hero must show a certain amount of ignorance in accepting the call, and in this way, Dorian follows Campbell's ideas, forging a connection between Campbell's journey and the queer journey. He mentions that "a blunder . . . reveals an unsuspected world, and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood" (Campbell 42). Regarding his portrait, Dorian says, "Every moment that passes takes something from me, and gives something to it. Oh, if it were only the other way! If the picture could change, and I could be always how I am now" (Wilde 28). In saying this, he fully accepts the call to adventure, albeit an adventure towards immortality. Though the exact supernatural machinery of the novel remains unclear, the main mystical component is clearly Dorian's portrait. The error or perhaps ignorance that leads to the creation of the portrait reveals an innocence or naiveté on Dorian's part. Perhaps he never means to bring to fruition his own desires, but his wish is granted regardless.

The hero requires movement from safe spaces into more dangerous spaces. Campbell says, "destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown" (48). Dorian moves from safe domestic spaces like Basil's garden into the more dangerous and arguably more Gothic spaces like the opium dens later in the novel. The opium dens function as the most Gothic space in the novel as they are dangerous and further deny Dorian his traditional

¹² Dickens's Pip could be seen as a normative Victorian hero, especially because he goes abroad to work.

heroism. Though traditional heroes enter such areas during their journeys, they do so to banish evil within, not to partake in it like Dorian does. Dorian's journey has begun, though its goal is largely different from the traditional hero's journeys, and the inversion of this journey's goal queers the narrative: it is set in opposition to altruism that a hero should typically exhibit and critiques the potential selfish nature of heroes in their quests to obtain power—in Dorian's case immortal youth. Traditional heroes generally focus on the safety or health of their society, but Dorian focuses his energies on himself. As such, Dorian's journey strays from the traditional hero's journey because it denies the sense of care and safety that heroes often exhibit for those around them. However, Dorian multiplies the pride or avarice that many heroes often exhibit as they alone are the saviors of their community. In contrast to traditional heroes, who keep this fault in check, Dorian embraces it.

In order for Dorian to navigate London and its treacherous physical and mental terrain, he must have a guide. Unfortunately, Henry Wooten acts as his mentor. Though he offers appropriate wisdom to Dorian for this particular journey, Henry's blatant self-interest opposes the guide as described by Campbell as the one "who appears to supply the amulets and advice that the hero will require" (59). Instead, Henry functions as a Mephistophelian character: "the lurer of the innocent into the realms of trial" (Campbell 60). After mentioning the importance of following one's own carnal desires, Henry realizes the power that he has over Dorian and takes advantage of Dorian: "With his subtle smile, Lord Henry watched him. He knew the precise psychological moment when to say nothing. He felt intensely interested. He was amazed at the sudden impression that his words had produced" (22). Throughout the novel, Henry pushes Dorian towards

hedonism, and Dorian internalizes Henry's beliefs so much that he admits to having believed Henry's theories about love and pleasure (75).

To that end, Henry is the anti-mentor, speeding Dorian along the path of destruction and further denying him heroic character growth. Clausson describes Henry's relationship with Dorian as "an experiment: Dorian's development is explicitly characterized as the result of an experiment that Lord Henry, the Gothic scientist in the role of the decadent aesthete, performs on the young Dorian" (352). Rather than let his experiment fail, even when Dorian tries to better himself, Lord Henry persuades him otherwise: "Don't spoil it by renunciations. At present you are a perfect type. Don't make yourself incomplete" (206). Though such advice would be offered to the hero in an effort to dissuade him from making the wrong choice, Henry tempts Dorian to remain hedonistic and follow his own desires.

Henry subverts the role of the mentor through his use of the unnamed book to pervert Dorian. A magical amulet of sorts, the book details the life of a French decadent whose life resembles Dorian's own. The book consumes Dorian, and he feels compelled to buy multiple copies of it.¹³ Henry's job of leading Dorian into hedonism is done when Dorian realizes the influence of the book which Henry lends him. Indeed, the description of the book is magical:

After a few minutes [Dorian] became absorbed. It was the strangest book that he had ever read. It seemed to him that in exquisite raiment, and to the delicate sound of flutes, the sins of the world were passing in dumb show

¹³ Though the book is unnamed, many critics believe that the book refers to Joris-Karl Huysmans's *À rebours*, a novel which illustrates the French Decadence movement.

before him. Things that he had dimly dreamed of were suddenly made real to him. Things of which he had never dreamed were gradually revealed.

(120)

The mentor should bestow helpful gifts that develop the hero, but this book instructs Dorian in hedonism, which heroes should resist. Dorian realizes the book's power to corrupt him when he says, "It was a poisonous book" (120). This book is analogous to Aeolus's bag of winds in *The Odyssey*. Though Aeolus is a positive mentor in the classic myth, the bag of winds, initially given to aid Odysseus, becomes destructive when the crew opens it, blowing the journey off course. As the Gothic anti-mentor, Lord Henry corrupts the symbolic amulet which should help Dorian, denies him heroic progress, and makes him even more hedonistic. Though Dorian likely projects feelings of personal guilt onto the book itself, he realizes that Henry has been leading him in the wrong direction.

Dorian and Lord Henry's relationship signifies a further departure from the normative hero's journey through its being mediated by their implicit same-sex desire for one another. They buy each other gifts, spend a great deal of time together, and take extended trips with one another—actions that, while not explicitly homosexual, indicate more than just friendship. Further, the text notes Henry's appreciation of Dorian's "finely curved scarlet lips, his frank blue eyes, his crisp gold hair" (Wilde 19). As their relationship develops, Dorian says to Henry, "I would sooner come with you; yes, I feel I must come with you. Do let me. And you will promise to talk to me all the time? No one talks so wonderfully as you do" (44). Dorian's anxiety over their separation indicates a relationship that supersedes normative mentorship. In this way, the novel approximates their same-sex relationship through their time spent together and their

intense homosocial bonds, though the text never explicitly states they (or anyone else for that matter) are in what could be called a homosexual relationship.¹⁴ Indeed, this literal queerness enables the narrative queerness that runs throughout the whole novel: as Dorian's queer sexuality becomes more apparent, his hero narrative increasingly diverges from Campbell's normative hero's journey. A normal interpersonal relation between the two is denied in this subverted relationship. Henry lives vicariously through Dorian by being his anti-mentor. Whereas Henry advances the quest, Basil actually attempts to halt it and thus functions as the threshold guardian, the next portion of Campbell's departure phase.

The threshold guardian obstructs the quest and, as Campbell says, stands "at the entrance to the zone of magnified power" (64). By the "zone of magnified power," Campbell gestures towards a separation of worlds—between immaturity and maturity. The hero begins in the natural world: Basil's garden is the closest that Dorian gets to the natural, but the defeat of the guardian grants the hero passage to the world of maturity wherein he must test his mettle against various other figures in the journey. Defeating the threshold guardian is a victory for the traditional hero as it allows the quest to continue, usually towards some object of power or aid.¹⁵ Dorian's threshold is the symbolic transfer of power and immortality over to him via the portrait. Though Basil does not actively imbue the painting with power, he creates it and is therefore linked to the supernatural machinery of the novel. As such, Basil must be "overcome" so that Dorian's quest can

¹⁴ In "Writing Gone Wilde," Cohen asserts that, on a linguistic level, Henry and Dorian's actual conversations are a code for their same-sex desire.

¹⁵ Here, think of Odysseus's defeat of Polyphemus to escape the cave.

continue. Initially, Basil claims that he cannot part with the painting because he put too much of himself into it (Wilde 14). However, Basil also seems to have some prescience about the impact that the painting will have on Dorian and tries to protect Dorian from its power. Basil forecasts his double defeat, saying, “as long as I live, the personality of Dorian Gray will dominate me” (15). He is always-already defeated.

Dorian’s first domination of Basil occurs when Dorian takes the painting from Basil in his art studio. As a result, Basil “[flings] himself down on his sofa, and a pained look [comes] into his face” (32). The primary defeat of the threshold guardian in this instance allows for Dorian to enter Campbell’s “zone of magnified power.” The portrait allows him to become eternally youthful, which effectively arms him for the rest of the journey. The guardian has been finally removed, and Dorian’s transition into the “zone of magnified power” proceeds uninhibited. However, Basil rises again towards the end of the novel when he confronts Dorian in his home. Basil attempts to lead Dorian away from destruction by pointing towards God as a means of salvation, but Dorian believes that he is beyond redemption and finally overcomes the guardian when he murders him.

Though Basil has already been defeated, Dorian queers the narreme of the threshold guardian when he murders Basil. Unlike most traditional heroic confrontations with the threshold guardian, this scene implies sexual desire based on Basil’s attraction to Dorian. In describing the murder, the text says, “[Dorian] rushed at [Basil], and dug the knife into the great vein that is behind the ear, crushing the man’s head down on the table, and stabbing again and again” (151). Further, Dorian notices that “something began to trickle on the floor” (152). Though literally a murder, the scene can also be read as a violent rape: the knife the phallus, Dorian the rapist, and Basil the raped. In an

unfortunate turn, Basil's implicit same-sex desire for Dorian at the beginning of the novel has been fulfilled; however, Dorian's moral decay precludes any sort of healthy sexual fulfillment—homosexual or otherwise.

Initiation

After Basil's initial defeat, Dorian moves into the initiation phase. Campbell explains that in initiation, the hero must face and overcome challenges that will demonstrate his maturity. The hero must prove himself, and Dorian's relationship with Sibyl Vane exemplifies this stage of the quest. Though not necessarily a trial, the encounter with the goddess is a phase of maturation. Campbell says that initiation "is commonly represented as a mystical marriage" with, in this case, a goddess-like character (91). The goddess is a complicated figure who "encompasses the encompassing, nourishes the nourishing, and is the life of everything that lives," while simultaneously being "the death of everything that dies" (Campbell 95). Because she is an actress, Sibyl fits this characterization rather well. At the beginning of every play, she is born into the new character, and she dies once the play is over. Dorian's description empowers her to control life and death as the goddess does: he says, "One evening she is Rosalind, and the next she is Imogen. I have seen her die in the gloom of an Italian tomb, sucking the poison from her lover's lips" and later says, "Sibyl Vane is sacred!" (51, 52). However, their encounter changes them both for the worst. Because of Dorian's corrupting influence, Sibyl loses her acting ability and thus her status as the goddess.

Initially, Dorian loves Sibyl's artifice: her shifting life-and-death cycle appeals to Dorian because it is at all times just an appearance. While she is an actress, she has no fixed truth or identity. Dorian's love for Sibyl, however, stops her cyclical life-and-death

and makes her a fixed point in space, unworthy of Dorian's attention. Since love is a purifying symbolic force, Sibyl stops acting because she believes that Dorian loves her for her true self, but Dorian proves her wrong when he announces, "without your art you are nothing" (85). The wife, traditionally a symbol of life, is in the Gothic text denied generative capability and reduced to a hollow shell. Sibyl finally commits suicide after she and Dorian separate; her removal from the text further denies Campbell's structure.

Campbell proposes that there should be a marriage of some sort, but the novel replaces this narreme with Sibyl's suicide. Because of Sibyl's premature death, Dorian cannot amend his sins by marrying her. A marriage between Sibyl and Dorian would have absolved Dorian of some of his sins by making him appear more human and less monstrous, and Sibyl's abjuring her supernatural powers make her unfit for Dorian to marry and thus denies this narreme. Additionally, marriage would have given Dorian more veracity as a heterosexual hero. Instead, he remains a bachelor with an indeterminate sexuality. The union with the goddess fails to come to fruition, and Campbell's suggested narreme becomes the death of the goddess, a uniquely Gothic narreme.

Dorian denies the idea that the hero should encounter the goddess and marry her, thus subverting Campbell's structure and queering the expected relationship with Sibyl. While the Gothic narrative denies him the chance of heroism in that capacity, Dorian's supposed "failure" to achieve heroism becomes queer success. The failure also offers a critique of normative success: is one successful just for having found someone to protect or to love? Arguably, the text answers that with a no as James Vane, Sibyl's hyper-protective brother, ends up "hidden in a nameless grave in the Selby churchyard" (210).

James's potential as hero is denied since he dies a small death in the novel, and his obsession with protecting a woman leads to his being unceremoniously and accidentally shot. Dorian, however, continues his quest after James's death, freed from one of his largest persecutors in the novel. Dorian's failure to embody the hero in relation to the marriage of the goddess signifies one of the ways in which the queer Gothic hero develops.

Failed Return

After initiation, the novel attempts to transition into the return segment of the hero's journey but cannot. In the normal hero's journey, all the knowledge and experience that the hero gains on his journey must be injected back into society so that his journey will have meaning. That is to say that the hero will share what he has learned or what he has gained from his quest with the community for its betterment. Campbell explains the importance of the return segment, saying

when the hero-quest has been accomplished . . . the adventurer must still return with his life-transmuting trophy. The full round, the norm of the monomyth, requires that the hero shall now begin the labor of bringing the runes of wisdom . . . to the renewing of the community. (167)

Closing Campbell's theory, the return brings the hero back into his community with the boon from his journey. Admittedly, Campbell accounts for a hero's inability to complete the journey and offers a positive alternative: the "refusal of the return" (167). Campbell says, "Numerous indeed are the heroes fabled to have taken up residence forever at the blessed isle of the unaging Goddess of Immortal Being" (167). The isle is a place of solace for the weary hero. For example, King Arthur is taken to Avalon with three

goddess figures after his death in Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*. The traditional hero's narrative offers the hero two choices: either complete the quest and return home or succumb to the perils of the journey and live forever with the Immortal Goddess. In the traditional hero's journey, death is not seen as punishment for not completing the quest but rather a reward for having attempted. However, Dorian's refusal of the return is fundamentally different from the refusal Campbell imagines. There is no Goddess of Immortal Being at this point. That figure died with Sibyl—if that powerful a figure is ever present in the novel. Dorian dies old and decayed in his home without the goddess and denies himself reentry back into society or into the blissful isle like the traditional hero.

Traditional readings of the novel view Dorian's death as accidental. I argue, however, that it is intentional. Normative readings claim that after separating from a young county girl named Hetty Merton in an ostensible effort to save her from the same fate as Sibyl, Dorian returns to his home only to be disgusted and haunted by his portrait. He at first resolves that he will better himself and stop sinning, thus renouncing his immorality. However, he wonders if this decision has been motivated by pride, vanity, or curiosity about a new sensation (212). He says, "Yes, [the portrait] had been conscience. He would destroy it" (212). In an effort to free himself from these doubts, Dorian destroys the painting and dies unexpectedly as a result. I suggest that Dorian commits suicide as a form of escape from the expectation of traditional heroic success and thus critiques it as a value. The role of the traditional hero is too much for him to bear.

Dorian's attempt at return begins when he realizes his own moral decay, but the text exhibits ambiguity and indecision over its end. Dorian vacillates over whether or not

it is “his duty to confess, to suffer public shame, and to make public atonement” or that “there had been nothing more” to his renunciation of his relationship with Hetty than pride and vanity (212). After killing Basil and causing Alan Campbell’s suicide, Dorian’s monstrosity peaks.¹⁶ Dorian realizes that he must keep himself in check and attempts to curtail his behavior. When Lord Henry asks him, “Why have you stopped playing, Dorian?” he expresses disappointment over Dorian’s departure from hedonism (207). Dorian claims, “It is because I am going to be good . . . I am a little changed already” (207). Dorian attempts to end his quest here in that he tries to stop following Henry’s dogma of hedonism. Dorian hopes that his good intentions can carry him over into repentance, but the Gothic narrative cannot be stopped now.

Gillespie agrees that the novel itself is open to various interpretations. He claims that the novel reinforces “the reader’s growing sense that any of a number of equally valid yet diverse points of view can make a legitimate claim to being a genuine imaginative representation of Dorian Gray” (*The Picture of Dorian Gray* 37). Further, John Paul Riquelme claims that the Gothic shoulders the collapse of the art object and the real, of Dorian the portrait and Dorian the person: “the merger is possible, and inevitable, because of the tendency of Gothic writing to present a fantastic world of indulgence and boundary-crossing and the tendency of the aesthetic” (610). The Gothic energies allow for my reading since they promote a collapse of boundaries: the painting and Dorian have figuratively become the same person. Indeed, Dorian can change the painting by sinning, so his cutting it must have some effect as well. Further, given the novel’s focus on

¹⁶ Sanna implies that, given the criminality and punishment for the crime, Campbell and Dorian could have had a relationship, but Campbell chose to kill himself rather than be revealed by Dorian. See “Silent Homosexuality” for more information.

aesthetic representation as realized in the portrait, separating Dorian from his portrait is difficult.

Though ignorant of exactly how the painting is linked to him, Dorian knows that destroying it will result in some sort of bodily harm. Dorian uses the knife that “had stabbed Basil Hallward,” claiming that “it would kill the past, and when that was dead he would be free” (207). In using this particular knife, Dorian subconsciously links the weapon to death and thus transfers his desire for his own death into his actions. Dorian and his portrait have collapsed into metonymy for one another: he can live and sin while the portrait acts as a phylactery for his sin and age. Dorian can incur spiritual harm whereas the portrait cannot, but any injury suffered to the portrait will have irrevocable consequences for Dorian who understands that the peace obtained by destroying the portrait is the peace of death. In order to carry out this almost impossible moral change, Dorian believes that he must destroy his portrait. He claims that destroying it “would kill this monstrous soul-life, and without its hideous warnings, he would be at peace” (212). Dorian destroys the portrait and negates its supernatural power. The power rebounds as he crumples to the ground “withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage” (213). His youth has been revoked, causing him to decay and transform into what he should be. Our hero is dead, and his quest is over.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

In the Victorian context, the queer Gothic hero must die, either directly or indirectly, by his own hand in order to be fully realized as a hero. Mieke Bal realizes this possibility of failure when she says, “Nineteenth-century heroes were characters who could survive in a hard and ruthless society, or who attempted to do so but failed” (131). However, this observation does not explain what the failure ultimately achieves or demonstrates. Dorian’s failure is productive. Indeed, Alley says, “death does not disqualify necessarily a character as a moral constant, the yardstick by which others are measured, nor does the death of the innocent necessarily abnegate a moral order” (Alley par. 4). Illustrating Halberstam’s idea of queer failure, Dorian does not deny himself heroism as such through his death and normative failure but rather critiques the normative category of hero through failure. As Halberstam says, queer failure “dismantles the logics of success and failure” (*Queer 2*), and thus Dorian’s own failure to complete Campbell’s normative journey enables the critique of the narrative structure.

Heroes are expected to succeed in their quest or at least have tried hard enough to make their way to the blessed isle. Dorian, however, does neither of these things. He fails at being hedonistic enough and dies without achieving anything. Opposed to the traditional hero, Dorian has helped no one and has only hurt those around him. Denying normative expectations of power, the quest gives agency to the queer subject to determine his own fate. This denial subsequently wrenches power from dominant and normative structures that define heroism and show how the queer narrative restructures classical heroism. Thus, the structures that govern success and failure must be reconsidered to

include new, queer identities and narratives. Dorian's ostensible failure proves successful since it challenges the binary of success and failure, making it a queer failure.

While the novel alone did not change the Victorians' minds about homosexuality, it did participate in the discourse of queer possibility and encourage readers to recognize the presence of queerness. Hughes and Smith argue that

even where conventional moralities and identities are proclaimed as ultimately triumphant in a Gothic text, the very fact that they have been challenged signifies that they have been interrogated and, if their boundaries have been tested, then they have equally been contemplated.

(1-2)

The reaction to the novel and its thematic implications shows that the populace's understanding of sexuality and heroism were changing. People resist what is foreign and new; intense critical and dismissive actions towards this novel show that, in some way, the novel instigated a shift in perception. Of course, the Wilde trials most importantly illustrate this shift, but the novel manifests it through the refiguring of the hero. Dorian resists and escapes the looming figure of normative heroism. Put differently, normative heroism represents normative masculinity, the queer Gothic hero represents the queer subject, and Dorian's suicide represents the queer subject's denial of normativity.

Suicide is often viewed as an action of weakness and that those who do it are considered to be victims of their society and its often harsh or unsympathetic rules; however, I read Dorian's suicide as fundamentally different: it is a heroic and dynamic act. If viewed as a type of weakness, his suicide could be read as a reinstatement of Victorian London's ability to regulate and control its citizenry, but I resist that reading as

it undermines the heroic energy in this novel. Conversely, the argument could be made for suicide being a signifier of strength through its resisting power. In Dorian's case, his suicide is an empowering act in two ways. First, Dorian's suicide further undermines the traditional hero figure. Heroes like Odysseus or Beowulf have an obligation to larger social, political, or patriarchal structures, but Dorian's suicide denies those structures their power to control the individual. Rather, Dorian exhibits what can be seen as the ultimate form of individuality in taking his own life, so agency remains within himself, and he owes no one anything. Second, Dorian's suicide crystallizes his identity, so he remains a bachelor even unto his death. In his suicide, our hero avoids the normalizing forces of society and thus denies them the ability to further interpellate him into their structure. His death essentially immortalizes him as the eternal bachelor. Dorian's suicide is a form of strength as it resists dominant societal and narrative impulses to become a "proper" citizen and a "proper" hero.

Put in conversation with Campbell's own theory of the hero, the hero narrative that *Dorian Gray* deploys critiques the heteronormativity implicit within the traditional hero's journey. Since much of the traditional hero's journey in Campbell is predicated upon the hero's normative sexuality, Dorian's queerness disrupts the archetype of the hero and his expected narrative. Instead of performing as a heteronormative hero, Dorian denies marriage, traditional heterosexual desire, and the social roles of patriarchal heroes. The normative hero would typically fulfill those expectations. As such, Dorian and his narrative critique the narrative structure of the normative hero through the novel's numerous rejections of the traditional hero's heteronormative narrative. Though Campbell's structure certainly shows how heroism can be identified in a number of texts,

Wilde's novel likewise complicates Campbell's theory: the rather narrow heteronormative hero is deconstructed through my reading to make way for Dorian's unique heroism to emerge. Rather than trying to disprove Campbell entirely, I have tried to show how his theory is perhaps not expansive enough as non-normative subjects fall outside its pale. Essentially, Campbell provides the framework for this analysis, but *Dorian Gray's* unique narrative provides the specificity. My reading of the novel expands on Campbell's construction of the hero and his journey, updating it for contemporary subjects.

In this thesis, I have shown how traditional heroism cannot exist in Gothic narratives, how the queer Gothic hero emerges in this Gothic narrative, and how the failure of the hero can be seen as success in queer terms. The smaller, narremic analyses point to the small deviations in Dorian's journey and express social disruptions. As a product of this new journey, queer Gothic heroism is fundamentally different from Campbell's notion of traditional heroism. Perhaps authors in the Victorian period pushed against the ruling ideology and used writing to interrogate how heroism was performed in society. What remains, though, is the purpose of the Gothic: to question, to disassemble, and to create something from the rubble. In this analysis, we find the creation of the queer Gothic hero, a hero of failure whose power lies within his ability to escape structures that have no place for him. Taken further, this new hero figure can inform the discourse of masculinity: since the figure of the hero is so typically heteronormative, reimagining the hero as queer in some instances allows for new understandings of and implication for the hero figure to emerge.

WORKS CITED

- Abrams, M.H., and Geoffrey Galt Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 10th ed. Boston: Wadsworth, 2012. Print.
- Alley, Henry M. "The Gay Artist as Tragic Hero in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*." *CLCweb: Comparative Literature And Culture* 11.2 (2009): n.pag. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 20 Mar. 2014.
- Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. 2nd ed. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1997. Print.
- Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. 3rd ed. Novato: New World Library, 2008. Print.
- Clausson, Nils. "'Culture and Corruption': Paterian Self-Development Versus Gothic Degeneration in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*." *Papers on Language and Literature: A Journal for Scholars and Critics of Language and Literature* 39.4 (2003): 339-364. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 25 Nov. 2013.
- Cohen, Ed. "Writing Gone Wilde: Homoerotic Desire in the Closet of Representation." *PMLA* 102.5 (1987): 801-813. *JSTOR*. Web. 30 Jan. 2014.
- DeMers, Sandra. "Introduction to the Hero's Journey." *Making the Middle Ages Fun*. Loyola U, June 2000. Web. 3 Dec. 2013.
- Dorfman, Eugene. *The Narreme in the Medieval Romance Epic: An Introduction to Narrative Structures*. Toronto, U of Toronto P. 1969. Print.
- Garrett, Peter K. *Gothic Reflections: Narrative Force in Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2003. Print.

- Gillespie, Michael. *The Picture of Dorian Gray: "What the World Thinks Me."* New York: Twayne, 1995. Print.
- . "Reviews and Reactions." *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Ed. Michael Gillespie. New York: Norton, 2007. 353-358. Print.
- Glick, Elisa. "The Dialectics of Dandyism." *Cultural Critique* 49 (2001): 129-163. *JSTOR*. Web. 28 Nov. 2013.
- Halberstam, Judith. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham: Duke UP, 2011. Print.
- . *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*. Durham: Duke UP, 1995. Print.
- Hennelly Jr., Mark M. "Framing the Gothic: From Pillar to Post-Structuralism." *College Literature* 28.3 (2001): 68-87. Web. 3 Nov. 2013.
- Hughes, William, and Andrew Smith. *Queering the Gothic*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2009. Print.
- Lehman, Benjamin. *Carlyle's Theory of the Hero: Its Sources, Development, History, and Influence on Carlyle's Work*. Durham, Duke UP. 1928. Print.
- Ridenhour, Jamieson. *In Darkest London: The Gothic Cityscape in Victorian Literature*. New York: Scarecrow-Rowman & Littlefield, 2013. Print.
- Riquelme, John Paul. "Oscar Wilde's Aesthetic Gothic: Walter Pater, Dark Enlightenment, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 46.3 (2000): 609-631. *Project Muse*. Web. 15 Apr. 2014.
- Sanna, Antonio. "Silent Homosexuality in Oscar Wilde's *Teleny* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*." *Law and*

Literature 24.1 (2012): 21-39. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 31 Jan. 2014.

Smith, Andrew. *Victorian Demons: Medicine, Masculinity and the Gothic at the fin de siècle*. New York: Manchester UP, 2004. Print.

Weineck, Silke-Maria. "Loss of Outline: Decadence as the Crisis of Negation." *Pacific Coast Philology* 29.1 (1994): 37-50. *JSTOR*. Web. 30 Jan. 2014.

Wheeler, Kip. "Literary Terms and Definitions: B." *Literary Terms and Definitions*. Carson-Newman U, Mar. 2014. Web. 20 May 2014.

Williams, Anne. *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995. Print.

Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. New York: Penguin, 2003. Print.

Zeikowitz, Richard E. "Befriending the Medieval Queer: A Pedagogy for Literature Classes." *College English* 65.1 (2002): 67-80. *JSTOR*. Web. 6 Mar. 2014.