

## CHAPTER THREE

### CONCLUSION

In Chapter Two, I have elaborated the analysis concerning the significance of Dorian as a symbol of social degeneration and moral decadence within Britain in Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray and Will Self's Dorian: An Imitation. To complete this thesis, in this chapter, I would like to present the conclusion of what has been discussed so far.

The use of symbolism is a common practice in writing literary works for the simple reason that one thing can mean or symbolize another thing, specifically in the world of literature. It is derived from believing that when an author writes a work of literature, he must have something in his mind that he would like to point out in his writing. One way to do so is by using symbolism, which enables an author to conceal the layered meaning. The exact same belief also serves as the basis of supposing that both The Picture of Dorian Gray and Dorian: An Imitation are more than just stories about a man who sells his soul for eternal youth and beauty. Indeed, during the reading process, it is natural for readers to differ in their interpretation since symbols appeal to the knowledge, concept, and culture, which are different for everybody. However, in this thesis, the difference will not happen to the interpretation of the two novels owing to the application of the Historical Approach, an approach that is based on factual, and

not relative, facts or occurrences, which are the same and unchanged for everybody.

Having analyzed The Picture of Dorian Gray and Dorian: An Imitation in their relation to the major historical happenings in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries Britain, I am of the opinion that it seems that both authors share the same feeling of apprehension for the social degeneration and moral decadence of Britain. Within the two novels, it is arguable to say that both Wilde and Self put their critical thinking, covered up beneath the surface meaning. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, Britain was in a different sort of decline as it was in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but a certain debauchery was at the root of it. By writing the novel, Self wants to show that a century had passed, yet the evocation of deterioration could still be felt and it seemed to be even stronger. Echoing Wilde, Self finds Britain “in the process of burning most of its remaining illusions” (Self, 2002: 36). Moreover, concealing the layered meaning as neatly as possible, both authors use the Dorian character to imply this very idea and to propose their self-criticism. Using symbolism, it seems that both authors want to suggest that whenever Dorian exists and lives in the world, particularly in Britain, this aura of debauchery is waiting to spread out. What Lionel Johnson, a 19<sup>th</sup> century prominent English poet and critic, asserts in his poem In Honorem Doriani Creatorisque Eius as “Here are the apples of Sodom; here are the very hearts of vices, and tender sins,” (Ellman, 1980: 40) might be true considering every historical facts cited in the previous analysis, to some extent, evokes the sinfulness and wrong-doings, which roamed within Britain’s declining condition particularly in both eras.

Understanding history, people cannot help but be impressed by the great nations and empires of the past. However, history also shows us that “nations rise and fall”; the Babylonian, Greek, and Roman Empires are among many, whose stories of the come-and-gone justified the saying. Having discussed both The Picture of Dorian Gray and Dorian: An Imitation, it is reasonable to say that Britain was once declining and most likely is still in the process of deteriorating. The British have witnessed their empire, the greatest empire the world has ever seen, crumble down before their very eyes within a few decades. They kept a stiff upper lip as what they have learned to adopt as good Britons. A century later, after having witnessed the Empire dissolved into the Commonwealth, the British people were compelled to see how the nation as a whole was falling apart as well. This truly raises an open question to argue about of whether or not a nation can long endure. Richard F. Ames (2006) argues that no nation or empire can last long without moral character, quoting from former U.S. Education Secretary William Bennett’s somber words:

“National prosperity, as it happens, is largely dependent on lots of good private character. If lying, manipulation, sloth, and lack of discipline become commonplace, the national economy grinds down. A society that produces street predators and white-collar criminals has to pay for prison cells. A society in which drug use is rampant must pay for drug treatment centers. Just as there are enormous financial benefits to moral health, there are enormous financial costs to moral collapse.”

The above quotation gives an idea about the connection between a country’s prosperity and its government and citizens’ moral conduct. An important notion in The Picture of Dorian Gray and Dorian: An Imitation is the correlation between the British society and its individual members, which in this case is represented by

Dorian character. Dorian's being homosexual and narcissistic, as well as remaining young, truly reflect Britain's problematic political and economical situation in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, which, in other words, reveal the social degeneration and moral decadence within the country.

The Picture of Dorian Gray reads like "a commemoration" for its own time. In the meantime, Dorian: An Imitation can be perceived like "an elegy" for some very dark years of the 1980s. Thus, it would not be surprising if later in years ahead, there will be a novel published to revise Wilde's original plot and which will somewhat serve as "a premonition" for what is going to happen in the year 2080. One thing for sure is that the author, whoever he or she might be, will have the idea of social degeneration and moral decadence in mind while writing the novel, just as Wilde and Self once had.