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**THE THEME OF MORALITY, BEAUTY AND FALSE VALUES IN OSCAR
WILDE’S NOVEL “THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY”**

Bachelor’s Thesis

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INTRODUCTION

“The Picture of Dorian Gray” was first published in 1890 during the late Victorian period. That time was a mixture of science and spirituality, as well as romanticism and realism. There were a lot of political and cultural changes, including industrialisation, arguments over the social structure, and how authors used literature as their oppositional space, where their own concerns regarding modernity, spirituality and the loss of religious faith were discussed.

Victorian fiction was characterised by the century’s scientific and materialistic approach, which eventually resulted in aesthetes and decadent authors looking at people as material beings. Writers realised the connection between the materiality of objects and the materiality of people, just like Oscar Wilde did in “The Picture of Dorian Gray”.

The actuality of the bachelor thesis lies in the fact that Oscar Wilde worked with themes that are still relevant two centuries after publishing the novel. It is relevant in terms of social values, morals, public image, self-confidence and vanity, as well as same-sex relationships.

The aim of the work is to analyse the specifics of the artistic world of “The Picture of Dorian Gray”, the main themes and ideas, the author’s style, the era, the society and its values that created and influenced the novel; to explore the methods of teaching materials about Oscar Wilde’s personal life and literary career in secondary schools and to give a detailed analysis of the level of knowledge of pupils and their attitude to the main characters; to explain and demonstrate why the book has gained a significant place in the world literature.

The thesis focuses on Dorian Gray’s character as a misunderstood young man and modern monster in English literature. Therefore, the thesis attempts to analyse each aspect of Dorian’s character, as well as his influences and the circumstances that ultimately led to his downfall.

The subject matter of this thesis is aestheticism and symbolism as literary devices; to study 19th-century English literature, including important concepts such as genre, subgenre, theme, symbolism in Gothic novels and others. “The Picture of Dorian Gray” is a representation of Gothic fiction characterised by aestheticism. It explores and analyses the Aesthetic movement’s peculiarities through its main ideas and characters.

The object matter of the thesis is to define the historical, social and literary background of England in the 19th century. The work focuses on the Aesthetic movement in England, its main features, principles and goals, the idea of the Art for Art’s Sake and the main characteristics of Wilde’s aestheticism.

The goal, as well as the object and subject matter determines the formulation and solution of the following tasks:

- to consider the biography of Oscar Wilde and the circumstances of the Victorian era he lived in and described in his novel
- to analyse the features of the writer's artistic manner in the image of social and cultural life of the 19th-century British society
- to consider the use and development of the theory of aestheticism, the Aesthetic movement and the principles of the Art for Art's Sake
- the significance of the novel

The theoretical value of the thesis lies in the fact that it introduces different literary terms, artistic principles that Oscar Wilde uses in "The Picture of Dorian Gray", explores the novel's main themes and moral lessons and gives a detailed comparative analysis of the values and ideologies of the 19th-century and 21st-century society. The theory of aestheticism, its main ideas and aims are described in detail.

The practical value of the thesis is that it explores the methods and techniques of teaching materials in Transcarpathian secondary schools. It gives a detailed analysis of the level of the pupil's knowledge of 19th-century English society and literature.

Many literary critics and scholars dealt with Oscar Wilde's theory of aestheticism and his famous novel, including its diverse characters. 21st-century experts and critics of modern and postmodern literature, such as Henry Alley, John R. Maynard, Galina Derkach, Laszlong Erdos studied Oscar Wilde's personal life and literary career in detail.

The hypothesis that encompasses Oscar Wilde's life is his confidence in his own philosophy of art. Oscar Wilde claimed that he was a high priest of aesthetics and he strongly believed in his own thoughts and ideas concerning these subjects.

Aesthetics is a theory concerning a set of principles involving nature and the appreciation of art and beauty. Oscar Wilde's life and his works were characterised by the usage of aesthetic images, themes and ideas.

The methods used in the thesis are: comparative, statistical, descriptive and synthesis of the collected data.

The thesis consists of three parts that are further divided into different sections. The first part deals with defining and explaining the literary terms regarding "The Picture of Dorian Gray". It also focuses on the novel's criticism and significance in the 21st century. The second part examines Dorian Gray's character and the circumstances, influences and beliefs that make

him a modern monster in English literature. The third part contains the details and results of the questionnaire that was carried out as the method of the research on the impact Oscar Wilde's novel has on today's youth.

PART 1

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF GOTHIC LITERATURE

A genre is a tool that enables us to analyse literature and different texts within it. It is a category of literature that involves a specific set of characteristics. A genre is also used for the division of various types of art, including music, painting and movies.

Every writer gets associated with a certain genre of literature when they become successful and well-known enough. However, it is important to note that it does not limit the writers to that specific genre. They can either continue to write in a genre they have before or they can choose to go in an entirely new direction. There is a long list of writers who have become associated with a specific genre.

For instance, Stephen King is known for his horror stories, Jane Austen for her romance novels, Toni Morrison for black feminism and more. Each of these writers invented their stories according to a particular genre, following its main themes, structure and style.

The most outstanding writers take what they like or need from the traditional form, then improve and make some changes to it, leaving something new and unique that represents them in that genre. To put it another way, a genre can be described as a source of creativity.

1.1. Types of genres

Each genre is identified by its form, content and style. The word genre originates from a French phrase that means 'kind' or 'type'. It helps us to classify literature and to compare different works within the same genres.

Genre in general began as a classification system for ancient Greek literature which is known from Aristotle's *Poetics* (Allan, 2014). The ancient Greeks created genres to divide literature into three main categories: prose, poetry and performance.

In addition to this, each genre can be split by tone, content, the length of the novel as well as its literary techniques and devices. As time went on, the role of genres has become more important: it has become a dynamic tool that helps people understand art. Recognising and analysing different types of genres allows us to see the relationships between all kinds of texts, whether they are informative, scientific or imaginative.

However, we should not confuse genres with age categories in literature such as children, young adult and adult stories. Although we can categorise literary works by their format, such as graphic novel or picture book, genres are not the same as formats.

Literature can be divided into genres and subgenres (Collins, 2014). With the development of literature, the main three genres have become poetry, prose and drama.

Poetry is literary work in which feelings and imaginative thoughts are described with the help of distinctive style and rhythm (Webster, 1995). This genre is made for pleasure and entertainment.

Prose includes novels, short stories, letters, fiction, nonfiction and more (Kuiper, 2011). It applies a natural flow of speech and has a regular grammatical structure. It is written without line breaks and rhythm. The most common types of prose are the following:

- fictional prose
- nonfictional prose
- heroic prose
- prose poetry

Fictional prose is an imagined or theoretical literary work. A novel can be used as an example of fictional prose.

Nonfictional prose is mostly based on facts, but sometimes it can contain fictional elements. Examples may include essays and biographies.

Heroic prose is a story that is meant to be recited. It contains a lot of expressions of oral tradition. Tales and legends belong to the category of heroic prose.

Prose poetry is described by the usage of emotional effects. They are written in prose instead of verse (Lehman, 2008).

As mentioned before, fiction and nonfiction are genres of literature as well. Both of these genres are further divided into subgenres that are described below.

The subgenres of fiction are the following:

Drama – by this genre we mean stories composed in verse or prose, where the actions and thoughts, feelings and emotions are expressed through the author's descriptions and the character's dialogues (Webster, 1995).

Fantasy – a genre that includes supernatural or magical elements. Fantasy works also combine the real world with a made-up one (Prickett, 1979).

Fairytales – stories that are mainly written for children in the first place. It features magical characters such as goblins, wizards and fairies. These tales are often traditional (Bettelheim, 1989).

Folklore – refers to tales, myths and stories that people tell. It is passed down by word of mouth (Sims & Stephens, 2005).

Legend – a story that focuses on a particular character and describes him and his journey. Many believe that the people mentioned in legends might have lived in recent times (Georges & Owens, 1995).

The subgenres of nonfiction are the following:

Biography – a genre that portrays the experiences of all the events that happened during a person's life. It consists of basic facts including the person's childhood, education, personal life and career (Lee, 2009).

Essay – a short form of a literary work based on a single subject matter. The author usually expresses their personal opinion in it (Holman, 2003).

Speech – oral communication. It includes the ability to express one's thoughts, ideas and emotions by using speech sounds and gestures.

1.2. Gothic as genre

In order to classify a novel as Gothic, we have to define the term "Gothic". During the 18th century, Gothic was given different connotations. At first, people negatively associated it with the so-called Visigoths, a northern European tribe that demolished The Roman Empire back in the 5th century.

The term denoted everything barbaric and uncivilised. In architecture it referred to works as irregular and aesthetically unpleasing, especially compared to the classical style of arts.

On the other hand, when England decided to distinguish its political, cultural and national identity, Goths were represented in a positive way. People referred to them as an artistic, freedom-loving tribe who were the ancestors of a democratic tradition.

The histories of Gothic architecture and literature are closely connected. They are similar in terms of the social, political and cultural environment of the 18th century. Various buildings characterised the settings and titles of Gothic novels.

However, in its search to discover hidden and forbidden things, Gothic literature contained a strong symbolic power. Consequently, Gothic novels are characterised by concepts like the heroine's domestic area and the abandoned castle as the villain's symbol of strength (Botting, 2001).

There are two basic appearances of home in Gothic literature. The first one is described as a safe place, linked to the ideal of domestic love and the female sphere. The other one is a haunted or abandoned castle. The house in Gothic novels is a sacred place where evil spirits are banished.

The house as the safe sphere and the woman living in it became a symbol of respectability in Victorian society. The main role of a woman during that period was to be a great wife and housekeeper. These two qualities were usually inseparable. Women were associated with the state of the places they were responsible for.

Although houses were the female domain, Victorian society started considering the appearance of other characters connected to the concept of home as well. These characters were usually male bachelors and scientists breaking the rules of society and God.

The castles were used as the primary settings of anti-home spheres in Gothic novels. Because of their complex structure and enormous size, the Gothic castles' obscurity expressed the fears of the 18th- and 19th-century. These places do not follow any social norms or ordinary laws. The castle often includes trap doors, secret rooms and passages, hidden or dark stairs as well as ruined wings. Monsters constantly appear in such castles, whether they are imagined or real. The villain's castle is a prominent element of Gothic literature and a distinctive feature of the numinous. It symbolises the villain's power and its eventual downfall as well as the destruction of the building. The environment's hostility is further increased by the fact that it has an unrealistically firm grasp on the people in it. All the emotional anxieties of the characters are combined into a single force from which they cannot escape.

An ancient prophecy is often connected with the castle and its owner. The prophecy is always confusing and requires the characters to find out the complete story and its meaning.

Gothic literature can be defined as writing that contains dark and mysterious scenery, melodramatic narrative devices, and an overall feeling of dread, fear and terror. A Gothic novel usually revolves around a big, ancient and sometimes abandoned castle that has a horrible secret or serves as a sanctuary of a threatening, probably evil character (Groom, 2012). Each Gothic novel is characterised by a mysterious and threatening feeling. The characters are usually scared of the unknown, more specifically of monsters hiding in secret places.

However, Gothic writers have also used supernatural and romantic elements in their stories, as well as historical characters and travel narratives to make the plot more entertaining.

The narration of the novels is highly sentimental. The characters often have to deal with their sorrow, anger and terror. Emotional monologues and crying are very frequent.

The line between Gothic literature and Romantic literature is very blurred. Early Gothic was considered to be a step towards Romanticism, while Gothic literature in the later periods was difficult to separate from Romantic literature.

In terms of Gothic literature, the Victorian period changed the setting of unknown, foreign locals to Britain. Although the present was described as the past, it maintained the Gothic connection between the present and past. The setting of some Gothic novels moved from the countryside to urban places. London was used among the most common cities described in Gothic novels. Cities were characterised as civilised, sophisticated but dark. There was a new element focusing on the emotional and physical imprisonment of women within certain households. This imprisonment usually reflected the emotional state of the characters.

Gothic literature developed during the Romantic era in England. The first literary mention of "Gothic" can be found in Horace Walpole's novel "The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story" which was published in 1764. The term "Gothic" was supposed to have been meant by the novel's author as an innocent joke. When Walpole used the word, he meant something like vicious, as during those times it had a negative connotation.

The story contained supernatural elements that launched an entirely new genre in Europe. Edgar Allan Poe, who was from America, got ahold of it in the mid-1800s and immediately succeeded. With the help of Gothic literature, Poe managed to explore psychological trauma, mental illness and the immoral side of men. Any modern-day horror or detective story writer, such as Stephen King or Tana French, owe a debt to Edgar Allan Poe.

The genre further developed in the 19th century, as Romantic authors including Sir Walter Scott started embracing the Gothic genre, then Victorian writers such as Oscar Wilde and Robert Louis Stevenson incorporated Gothic traits in their horror stories.

The most prominent elements that appear in Gothic literature are the grotesque description of characters and their surroundings as well as the presence of the sublime, uncanny and supernatural. Gothic features include dreams and nightmares, which refer to a state between being awake and asleep. The terrible truth, purpose or consequences of one's acts may be revealed to the characters and the readers through different visions, including dreams and nightmares.

Another important element of Gothic novels is the theme of death. It occurs in the unusual and supernatural world of ghosts, monsters, spirits and zombies. These characters as well as death are further associated with physical pain, torture, sinful desires and passions of the protagonists. Gothic literature is often characterised by a demonic presence. The most frequent demonic character is the devil himself, but the novels are saturated with other evil spirits, too. A distinctive element of Gothic literature is the double of the character, called the *doppelgänger*. It is usually described as the two sides of the character: the subconscious and the conscious.

“The Picture of Dorian Gray” is one of the works of *fin de siècle*, the last decade of the 19th century. This period is referred to as decadence. By the expression, we mean the areas that the Victorians prided themselves on, including different kinds of art, morality, beauty and standards.

The term “*fin de siècle*” did not refer only to a set of dates, but to a whole set of moral, social and artistic values. In the Victorian period, the subjects of moral decay, anxiety and terror were presented not only through the physical embodiment of Gothic literature, but through the human body as well. “The Picture of Dorian Gray” deals with themes of emotional development, change, moral degeneration and corruption in terms of the human body and soul. These literary subjects reflected a lot of scientific, social and cultural theories that became more popular toward the end of the 19th century (Quinn, 2006).

Decadence as a movement appeared in the 19th century in France and England as a response to the moral degradation, corruption and perversion evident in everyday life. Decadent men fell into a state of alienation. They distanced themselves from society and the natural world surrounding them, and started turning to unnatural, exotic matters that provided pleasure for them. However, this period is characterised by the overindulgence in aesthetics, art and beauty, which eventually leads to immortality.

The followers of decadence were associated with the aesthetes. According to the followers of both movements, there were not immoral or moral things and actions, only pleasant or unpleasant ones. Aesthetes encapsulated people in limited structures and experimented with their experiences, knowledge and identity.

There are different types of murders committed by decadent characters in literature. Aside from the murder of other people influenced by the decadent’s immoral nature, suicide is another form of murder that the decadent commits. It is usually the consequence of their own overindulgence in art and pleasure. Suicide is the ultimate act of decadence since the person

destroys his own body and soul. It can be defined as the ultimate sin and an act of violence against God's will.

According to most religious Victorian philosophers and critics, suicide is worse than the murder of other people because it cannot be punished. However, the act of suicide is a typical form of murder that the decadent characters - for example, Sibyl Vane - commit out of their prioritisation of love and art.

British decadents focused on the idea of aesthetics for its own sake. Their principle was to pursue all human desires and seek material things. The followers of this movement claimed that there was no search for the truth. According to them, there was no mystical truth, only material things needed to be found. If there was any truth of value, it would have been found in the passionate and sensual experience of the moment. Their lives, as well as their characters' storylines, were entirely encompassed by pleasure and passion.

While sublime was a reaction to the definition of beauty and virtue during Romanticism, it evolved into the admiration of aesthetic beauty in decadent texts. This idea of beauty differs from the traditional definition which mainly meant visually pleasing objects. Instead, the sublime in decadent writing was characterised by Gothic which was grotesque and horrifying.

The portrait in Wilde's novel is the embodiment of both beauty and the sublime. It is an aesthetically pleasing object, yet it contains dark and terrifying qualities. The painting also reflects the character's thoughts and feelings while the sublime reveals the grotesque history behind its transformation.

Victorian literature reflected its society. Poems and novels were used both for entertainment and intellectual progress and they had to reflect the desires and issues of the Victorian society.

The triple-decker novel, also known as the three-volume novel, was the established structure for Victorian novels. These novels were divided into three main parts: the beginning, the middle and the end. The triple-decker novels were meant to be read during family gatherings. Thus, its subjects had to be modest and respectful.

However, a lot of writers and critics considered the concept of the triple-decker to be limiting. According to them, authors had to be free of the dictatorship of Victorian libraries and families, and they needed to apply new structures of writing.

Soon, the triple-decker structure of novels was rejected by these writers. It is important to mention that these writers were mainly male authors. Middle- and upper-class women started looking for jobs during the 19th century, and among the most affordable and suitable jobs for them was writing. Women authors such as Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters and George Elliot

became well-known and successful during the Victorian period. Female authors were not only present in the sphere of novels, but their works were published in newspapers and magazines as well.

The success of women provoked jealousy and anxiety in male writers. Generally, men did not want women to be well-respected and successful, and more importantly, they were threatened by their literary works and careers. Thus, men tried to diminish the writings of female authors. They tried to associate novels written by women with maternity, marriage and family, and denying the triple-decker structure meant rejecting topics that were associated with maternity and femininity (Showalter, 1991).

Decadent literature explores the mind of men. By including Gothic elements such as the presence of supernatural creatures and terror, decadent authors were able to explore the details and depths of a world that has been built for and by men, and where women were constantly ignored or objectified.

“The Picture of Dorian Gray” is a great example of the fact that according to Victorian Gothic novels, terror did not come from any kind of dark nature, but was brought forward by Victorian society and its strict rules. The novel exposed the biggest fears and darkest secrets of male characters: the fear of losing their empire, the power of women and female sexuality, the fear of dying and of corruption.

Romantic and sexual relationships between males were often presented or hinted at in the novels. Given the hints at same-sex relationships, some of the novels have been considered to contain underlying homosexual tones, but some writers did not hide or made a problem out of such assumptions. A lot of authors aestheticised relationships filled with homoerotic desires. For some writers, including Oscar Wilde, homosexual love was the epitome of love because it showed the mutual understanding and desires between the same genders.

There have been arguments about the genre of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, trying to decide whether it is a decadent novel, a romance, or as Oscar Wilde claimed, an essay of decorative art.

The novel is greatly philosophical and contains different rhetorical questions and theories. These force the readers to acknowledge and contemplate several aspects of life, including morality, pleasure and the importance of outer beauty. The philosophical questions are mostly introduced through dialogues with other characters such as Lord Henry, and are examined in the mind of the title character. Although these questions are considered to be important, are never given a direct answer (Cohen, 1978).

Furthermore, the dilemma between good and evil fluctuates throughout the entire book, which always leaves it to the readers to make up their own minds about certain situations.

The main themes of the novel include the Faustian bargain, the balance of spirit and body, the double standards of society, self-discovery, sin and morality, narcissism and the dangers of one's influence and manipulation.

The novel is completely dominated by aestheticism (Budd, 2006). The term originates from Greek and means "perceiving through senses". It is a 19th-century European concept that dismisses morality. Instead, it focuses on the beauty and pleasures one can find in life (Jackson, 2002).

Oscar Wilde's preface to the novel contains a list of the writer's aphorisms that deal with aesthetics, artists and the readers. The preface focuses on the significance of beauty. This automatically sets the tone for the entire book: the readers realise that "The Picture of Dorian Gray" is a story full of aesthetic images and feminine, beautiful language.

In "The Picture of Dorian Gray", the emphasis is mostly on the beautiful and aesthetic surroundings that interrupt the work with detailed descriptions of interiors, flowers, accessories and more. The characters' goal is to fit into this exquisite, artistic world. The narration of the novel favours detailed descriptions of colours, shapes, scents, flowers, clothes, curtains and tapestries. Such aesthetic descriptions are presented at the very beginning of the story.

Decorative elements, music, books, gardens and perfumes have been originally associated with women since they showed concern for one's outer appearance. Besides looking beautiful, women were expected to find pleasure in activities such as painting, reading and sewing. These activities focused on creating non-utilitarian objects and they took place in private spaces that were always dominated by females. Therefore, taking care of their house and its design was considered to be a woman's responsibility.

Almost every social activity in the novel takes place in theatres, clubs, private houses or places connected to degeneration, such as opium dens. When Wilde described private houses, he mainly focused on their decoration as well as their gardens. Victorian gardens were considered to be part of the domestic sphere because women took care of beautiful plants there. It is also in a garden that Dorian Gray and Lord Henry first speak to each other alone.

The narration in "The Picture of Dorian Gray" clearly focuses on form over function. Victorian novels showed a tendency toward function over form and had a strict structure regarding the novels. In Oscar Wilde's novel, there is a strong emphasis on art, senses and symbols to satisfy the readers' aesthetic needs. Despite the tendencies that were mostly enjoyed

by women and related to femininity, these activities are celebrated by the male characters in “The Picture of Dorian Gray”.

All three of the main characters - Dorian Gray, Basil Hallward and Lord Henry Wotton - show that their views are strongly aligned with aestheticism. Apart from Dorian’s portrait, which was the most notable symbol, art was also shown in architecture, music and Sibyl Vane’s performances.

For instance, Dorian’s obsession with Sybil is an important embodiment of his love for aestheticism, as he loves her for her art of acting rather than as a person.

Moreover, Dorian’s appreciation for his own beauty is the main subject of the novel. After Lord Henry convinces Dorian that beauty, pleasure and youth are the most important things in life, Dorian starts following the man’s ideologies and is completely influenced by him. Dorian is ready to trade his soul for the eternal beauty he sees in the portrait made by Basil.

Basil Hallward’s most prominent trait, on the other hand, is that he is an artist. This immediately leads to the conclusion that aestheticism has always been part of Basil’s life and personal views. An essential tenet of aestheticism portrayed by Basil is the idealisation and obsessive love he feels for Dorian’s beauty and how he replicates it in the painting.

Finally, the lengthy descriptions of the artistic and valuable items in the buildings are always conveyed by Lord Henry, which shows the features of decadence, a term explained earlier in the thesis. In addition to this, aestheticism is represented by Lord Henry’s hedonistic ideology. The character claims that morality and religion are the diseases of their century and it prevents society from prioritising outer beauty and youth.

The Art for Art’s Sake (a French phrase from the early 19th-century) is an utterance that expresses the philosophy that the inherent value of art is separated from any political, informative or moral function. The term is automatically associated with the Aesthetic movement and its followers. This concept turns into a movement that strongly focuses on the usage of the appropriate techniques, values, hedonistic views and theories, and prefers immorality to a morally right, yet boring life.

A lot of writers even changed their writing styles during the 19th century. Their goal was to adapt to the peculiarities of this new trend. They were able to use this trend in their writing in their own way. The Art for Art’s Sake did not take itself seriously. It was characterised by different, sometimes even useless rules.

Oscar Wilde’s novel can be seen as a microcosm of 19th-century aestheticism as it explores the movement’s layers and peculiarities through its main characters (Duggan, 2015).

The Aesthetic movement in England had a big impact on the country's philosophy in the 19th century. It lasted from 1860 until 1900 and was considered to be a conscious rebellion against the moral values of Victorian society.

Additionally, its main aim was to escape the materialistic views of the Industrial Age by focusing on the importance of beauty and art. Aestheticism brought radical, revolutionary ideas to life. It demanded Victorian society to appreciate the beauty of art.

The followers of the Aesthetic movement believed that art should not seek to establish a moral or educational message, but should provide pleasure. They wanted to live beautifully.

The movement was characterised by three symbols: the sunflower, the lily and the peacock. The sunflower symbolised consistency; the lily represented purity; the peacock was the symbol of beauty. The *Picture of Dorian Gray* contained different symbols as well. For example, the word *peacock* appears four times throughout the novel. It symbolises beautiful and even majestic notions.

Oscar Wilde can be described as the father of the Aesthetic movement. He was very interested in the literary study of art and beauty. Wilde was the first significant writer to challenge the structure and style of classic literature and cause public controversy and disagreement for doing so.

Aestheticism in literature appeared in the lengthy descriptions of luxury and passion. Using the right stylistic structure and language was the main principle of writers following the Aesthetic movement. Wilde soon realised the power of words and he used them properly. He often played with words and phrases to create a unique atmosphere in his texts. In his times, Wilde was considered to be a great conversationalist. He was able to write witty dialogues, comic situations and express his own ideas through his characters' speeches.

The writer advocated freedom from the limits of morality and society. He saw art as a criticism of the Victorian period and superficial self-acceptance and self-love. Obviously, this ideology contradicted Victorian convention, according to which all forms of art had to be spiritually encouraging. Oscar Wilde went even further by claiming that an artist's life was more important than and kind of art he has ever produced.

Wilde was a high priest of beauty and art. His philosophy of aestheticism and the importance of art encompassed his entire life.

Even in his prose letter, "De Profundis," written during his imprisonment and misery, he still believes that he will be able to regenerate his soul, mind and values with the help of art. According to him, he would build beautiful and aesthetic things out of his sufferings, that he might even cry of relief and in triumph.

Oscar Wilde claimed that in order to have an aesthetically pleasing life, one has to live as a living piece of art. The writer's aesthetic principles consisted of three main ideas: that art is life, that art has to be positive and moral, and that art is entirely paradoxical.

Wilde and his followers considered the experiences of their lives as the most prominent aspects of beauty. Without beauty and art, life would be boring: it would not be whole or beautiful. According to Wilde's aesthetic theory, art and life are inseparable, because art is the essence of existence itself (Ellman, 1987).

The idea behind Oscar Wilde's philosophy of art was that everything in life should be enjoyable and beautiful. Also, the writer stated that everything should be good in life as well. To him, being good meant living in the present and being spontaneous.

An important component of Wilde's theory of aesthetics was the idea of combining morality and artistic values into a great work of art. He claimed that an aesthete cannot escape the moral basis of life because he cannot control time, only in his own imagination. Since the aesthete cannot control the time and changes in one's life, the only way to become free of moral responsibilities is in one's art.

Wilde's theories consist of the importance of constant creation. Being original and creative are the basic characteristics that artists should possess and use in their works. According to the writer, art should never be simplified. It should be put on a high pedestal and be admired (Babcock, 1978).

From the very beginning of his literary career, Wilde's aesthetic philosophy searches for the boundaries between content and form, beauty and virtue and art and life. These questions were critical during the Aesthetic movement. Art was a parallel universe for Oscar Wilde, and in his world, only beauty and aesthetics mattered. He did not think that art imitated life, but it managed to hide the ugliness of Victorian society and its norms.

In addition to this, Wilde described aestheticism as a kind of lifestyle, because that is the only way for men to be content and satisfied. Lord Henry's character can be viewed as the device for expressing aesthetic theories, while Basil's character is used for showing the importance of morality.

The Aesthetic project eventually ended with Oscar Wilde's public scandal, his conviction and imprisonment for homosexuality. Although the writer's fall strongly discredited the 19th-century art movement with the public, many of the principles and ideas of aestheticism remained popular even in the following centuries.

Furthermore, the story's setting is Victorian London as it presents a typical Gothic environment. 19th-century London acquires dark and negative attributes such as "dreadful",

“grey” and “gruesome”. The setting is a strong indicator of the Gothic side of the novel. The strange room in Gray’s house where he hides the constantly changing portrait resembles the Gothic places that served as concealment of one’s terrible secrets.

One of the clearest examples of the Gothic genre may be the way Dorian Gray’s painting illustrates the decay of his soul and moral sense (Bowen, 2016). This decay is hidden away from the other characters of the novel. Thus, Dorian Gray can keep his flawless outer beauty and social status, but it is still a burden for him throughout the story. Later, this degeneracy is noted by Basil as well: he does not accept the evil person Dorian has become and is disgusted by his now destroyed painting.

Another Gothic feature seen in the novel is the fear and psychological terror that is always present in Dorian’s life (Punter, 1996). He is horrified by the decay of his own moral sense and seeks to escape its consequences. The anxiety of his own actions, and his inability to reverse them, is what drives Dorian into insanity, which eventually becomes the cause of his death.

A Gothic point that arouses the readers’ interest is the novel’s style of slow transmission into dark, mysterious night-time scenes. For instance, Dorian is first introduced in a scene where he is bathed in glowing sunlight while appreciating the beauty of nature. As the story progresses Dorian’s adventures mostly occur during nighttime, probably to symbolise the darkening of his spirit and the loss of his morality.

Authors portrayed the objects in Victorian literature in great detail, which successfully extended their visibility and the true meaning behind their symbolism. However, there is a very rigid line between looking at things as symbols and seeing them for what they really are.

The novel’s plot shows elements of both realism and romanticism. Dorian’s admiration of the graceful and serene is part of romanticism, while his qualities of insanity and evil are seen as elements of realism. The book’s preface refers only to realism but it is wrapped up in elegance and virtue.

“The Picture of Dorian Gray” is filled with different symbols. By far the most prominent one is Basil’s painting of Dorian. The plot’s centrepiece is the portrait that interacts with Dorian Gray throughout the entire novel. This painting is considered to be the artist’s best work, however, it must stay unseen by each character except for Dorian.

Although it is rarely described and seen, the portrait’s presence is symbolic and metaphoric during the whole story. The painting represents the Victorian ideal of art. It also acquires a new status that is considered to be not only an easily portable object but a living, bodily thing as well.

Victorian fiction was the result of the century's scientific and materialistic approach, which eventually led to decadent authors, who denied the existence of spiritual goodness in people, to look at human beings as material beings. Therefore, decadent writers realised the connection between the materiality of different objects and the materiality of human beings as well, just like Oscar Wilde did in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Ransome, 1912).

The senses that can be seen as the primary evidence as one's existence and materiality are used in the novel, but not in a way that they represent the moral and spiritual aspects of the main character. Rather it emphasises the physical appearance of Dorian Gray, together with the portrait's materiality. Dorian experiences new sensations throughout the novel, and in each of them he is reminded that the materiality of his body is connected to the materiality of his soul, which is reflected in the picture. Each kind of sensation that the youth experiences or thinks of, automatically activates his physical body and soul at the same time.

Flowers are far less significant than the portrait, however, they appear throughout the novel. Dorian Gray buys orchids at crucial moments, such as when he blackmailed Alan Campbell into getting rid of Basil Hallward's body. Flowers also symbolise beauty and virtue and how briefly they last. The flowers' fleeting beauty stands in contrast to the increasing ugliness that represents Dorian's painting. The youth clings to a quality that is not meant to remain the same, which leads to his downfall.

The theater serves as a form of escapism. It is a kind of art and Dorian uses it as a means of successfully escaping his concerns regarding his moral sense. Moreover, the theater symbolises the way each character plays some kind of role in their own drama.

1.3. Gothic fiction in Victorian England

Oscar Wilde's Gothic novel was published in Lippincott's Monthly Magazine in 1890. At that time, Wilde worked as a journalist and editor, publishing a series of short stories and essays that made him a well-known literary figure.

The publication of the novel was received by immediate indignation and disgust. Victorians called it "effeminate", "perverted" and "unclean". As a consequence of the novel's homoeroticism, a moralistic scandal started. The author's hints at a romance between two men offended the sensibilities - literary, social and aesthetic - of Victorian book critics and scholars. However, it is important to mention that most of the criticism was personal. Critics attacked

Wilde for his hedonistic values, including his love for aestheticism, art and pleasure (Lynn, 2011).

Oscar Wilde's appreciation for aesthetics made him a fascinating person for his time. It contributed to the outrageous topics used in his writing. However, many critics suggested that Wilde used plagiarism in "The Picture of Dorian Gray". Taking pieces and stylistic devices from other works and putting them together with a unique perspective characterised Wilde's writing style.

In contrast to the common view that claimed that adaptations serve as poor copies of the original works, Wilde proved that they present a new way of looking at the original text, which makes them unique (Sloan, 2003).

As one of the best-known aesthetes of the Victorian period, Oscar Wilde's extravagant look and his attitude attracted the attention of Victorian society and media. The writer constantly presented himself with a flamboyant look. On the other hand, his self-fashioning was considered to be a performance by many. Wilde was a theatrical being and therefore, he lived life as if it was a theatrical performance.

However, "The Picture of Dorian Gray" was immediately labeled as immoral, probably because of its underlying homosexual themes and hints. For instance, The Daily Chronicle (1890) referred to it as a poisonous book.

The most prominent review of "The Picture of Dorian Gray" was in the conservative Scots Observer, which was edited by William Ernest Henry. The review accused Wilde of committing the crime of gross indecency that has been against the law according to the 1885 Criminal Amendment Act. As stated in the review, the novel was written only for "the outlawed noblemen and perverted telegraph boys". This was a reference to the 'Cleveland Street Affair', by which we mean the discovery that wealthy men used a male brothel to pay telegraph boys for sexual intercourse.

Only five years after the publication of "The Picture of Dorian Gray", Wilde was imprisoned for his homosexual affairs with a young man named Lord Alfred Douglas. The personal life of Oscar Wilde definitely had a big impact on the creation and the shaping of the novel and its themes.

"The Picture of Dorian Gray" is considered to be an effeminate novel both in its presentation as well as in the way the author described the characters. Many claim that the novel's setting is saturated with homoerotic desires and ideas. Wilde viewed aestheticism as an extension of homosexuality and used it as one of the main themes of his story.

Oscar Wilde's usage of language and style shows a feminine world. As the fields of aestheticism are mostly dominated by women, the author's focus on this subject automatically effeminized not only him, but the followers of the aesthetic movement as well (Schaffer, 2000).

The writer's language and style correspond to the aesthetic ideas of writing. Wilde often produced lengthy descriptions of different objects to emphasise their value and beauty. Also, Wilde sometimes uses Lord Henry's character as a device of philosophical ideas and theories. The character of the hedonistic man is used to make different remarks on beauty and aesthetics, which reflect the writer's philosophy as well.

Oscar Wilde used Dorian's effeminacy as a device to challenge the Victorian norms of gender roles, which also deals with his own conflicted identity and homosexual desires. Through the novel's protagonist, Wilde was able to express his inner conflicts and his disagreement with the values of Victorian society.

Wilde's mannerisms and interests were seen as feminine rather than masculine, namely his idea of beauty and art as well as his relationships with other men. The feminine side of the writer's personality was obviously manifested in Dorian's character, which plays a big part in his homosexual tendencies.

The descriptions of the different scenes can be defined as feminine, too. The novel opens with a scene dominated by bright feminine tones. This emphasises the homosexual environment the story is set in.

There is a significant focus on people belonging to the upper class in Oscar Wilde's novel. This might be caused by two reasons: the writer's family background and his social beliefs. Wilde was born into an aristocratic family and he was also brought up in a wealthy environment. The second reason can be explained by the fact that Oscar Wilde was scared of poverty. He did not want to even speak or write about it.

Wilde makes fun of the life attitudes and ideas of aristocrats. He attacked each layer of their hypocrisy. In his novel, he mocked the characters' focus on their outer appearance and the importance of their social status. This emphasis on outer beauty and youth was shown in the characters' admiration of Dorian Gray.

Although married people play a big part in Wilde's works, the concept of marriage is usually ridiculed or ignored as it was considered to be some kind of business. According to Oscar Wilde, being in love was a role that was invented and played by the Victorian society because it was fashionable and expected to be in love.

Therefore, Wilde used two different tools to criticise the upper class: he either mocked or attacked them. These two approaches manifest themselves in the notion of living a double

life. The people of the upper class were represented in a very disparaging way. They were described as shallow and superficial since they only cared about materialistic things and their appearance. Their main goal was to experience as much pleasure and passion as possible. Lord Henry's character represents the fatal consequences of being an upper-class man with false values and immoral ideas. He was ready to completely destroy Dorian's soul if it brought him enough entertainment and pleasure.

Although the novel was not appreciated in the 1800s, after the death of Oscar Wilde, it began to attract a great amount of interest. It has become the subject of different adaptations to both film and stage.

In 1913, it was adapted to the stage by writer Grace Constant Lounsbury in London. It was also the subject of different silent film adaptations. The 1945's film version of "The Picture of Dorian Gray" is considered to be its most popular and critically acclaimed film adaptation. In 2009, the novel was adapted into a film called 'Dorian Gray'.

A Hungarian musical, based on the novel, premiered in 1990. The musical's English version debuted in London five years later.

Moreover, the novel has been produced as an audiobook several times.

Looking at the novel two centuries after its first publication, contemporary critics and readers see the Victorian society's reaction as hysterical, blinded by fear, homophobia and prejudice. People nowadays accept same-sex romances and relationships in books, movies and TV shows more than they ever did. Homosexuality is no longer shameful, illegal or taboo. When it comes to reading about a certain topic, they claim that morality and pleasure can coexist, unlike people with Victorian moral values used to believe.

However, when "The Picture of Dorian Gray" was first published, it was celebrated by some Christian groups. The explanation behind this is that they considered the novel as a great warning against homosexual relationships. They claimed that Dorian's exploration of his own sexuality was just one of his immoral acts (Sinfield, 1994).

The novel's modernisation gives a new perspective on its themes and ideas, including vanity, toxic masculinity, sexism and sexuality. Each topic is still relevant nowadays.

One of the main themes of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is his vanity. The main character's biggest flaw is his obsession with his own outer appearance and the fear that one day he might lose that beauty. The actuality of this theme lies in 21st-century people's reliance on social media platforms. Most people post with the intention of showing off their outer traits and possessions to their friends and followers they do not even always know.

Thus, the central sin of using social media is vanity. The young generations today are mostly called the “selfie generation” and “selfie culture” which is the consequence of their obsession with external validation. Dorian Gray’s character perfectly fits this description, even though the story is more than one hundred years old.

On the other hand, Lord Henry Wotton is meant to be the impersonator of the values and ideologies of the Victorian era (Petrie, 2000). Also, the fact that his character still fits the exact description of the stereotypical masculinity nowadays says a lot about our society and how little people’s ideas of masculinity have changed throughout the years. Although he is married, Lord Henry hates the idea of commitment, constantly objectifies and sexualises women, goes to bars, drinks and smokes as much as he wants - every trait a “manly” man is supposed to have, that has survived even to these days.

Lord Henry emphasises his masculinity through his heterosexual marriage. This shows that heterosexuality and masculinity have always been connected in different cultures. Lord Henry also plays the dominant role in his relationship with Dorian. According to him, women should only be seen as decorative sex and pleasurable objects. Victorian marriages were described as cold since the relationship between husband and wife was emotionally and mentally distant.

Throughout the novel, the older hedonist man offers his advice on several subjects, including art and beauty, the pursuit of one’s desires and the true meaning of life. Women, his own wife included, don’t mean anything to him.

Although the majority of women are not troubled with any sexual feelings, their feelings are very modest compared to the sexual feelings of men, and women’s feelings are usually motivated by their passion for maternity. The evidence for this argument can be found in the fact that anticonception was not available during those times, and women purposely did not take part in sexual intercourse, so that they would not become pregnant.

The absence of female characters is striking in “The Picture of Dorian Gray”. The novel focuses on the lives of three men: Dorian Gray, Basil Hallward and Lord Henry. Women do not even appear often in their conversations, which shows the separate spheres of society during the Victorian period. The characters of the novel show various ideas regarding the Victorian definitions of sex. During the Victorian era, effeminate men like Dorian Gray had quite negative associations with sexual deviance, vice and their social status.

Dorian Gray spends most of his time with Lord Henry and his other male friends. The characters also read and visit a lot of different places. These qualities and activities do not only stress the separate male territory, but also show various characteristics of effeminacy. A lot of

sins that Dorian committed during the story are of homosexual nature, and therefore, the character is mainly described as a homosexual man.

In Oscar Wilde's novel, Dorian's character also displays masculine dominance by falling in love with a woman as innocent as Sibyl Vane. Sibyl's innocence represents passive feminine inferiority.

On the other hand, Dorian represents a very complex exploration of masculinity. The youth is described as a feminine, exceptionally beautiful male. Dorian Gray is the opposite of what society considered a real man to be.

Neither Lord Henry or Dorian Gray fit in the stereotype of masculinity during the Victorian period. They do not have a stable job, however, this does not define their position in society since they are both wealthy and respected men.

Gender roles were strictly regulated during the Victorian era. Society during these years is well-known for its strict moral codes. Men and women had to live in different circles. Men often had close relationships with other men, which means that they did not spend a lot of time with women. This gender segregation was maintained through different images and texts that both implicitly and explicitly claimed that work belonged to men. Thus, it was not appropriate for any women. Men appeared in the more dominant, public spheres that were separated from the feminine, private places of different households (Rose, 1986).

The Picture of Dorian Gray provoked the Victorian rules of the identity of middle-class men. The novel deals with several facets of masculinity. Men dominate the entire book. Those women who are mentioned or have a few, quite irrelevant lines, are constantly degraded, humiliated and objectified.

Oscar Wilde's narration of the female and male sex represented the hierarchical structure in Victorian England. In this context, it means that females were inferior to men. The fact that the novel completely revolves around three male characters, Dorian Gray, Basil Hallward and Lord Henry and their dialogues concerning women and their roles, marriage and sexual desires while female characters made only rare appearances throughout the story shows the minimal impact and social significance women had during the Victorian era. The ideas and thoughts of women were verbalised by the novel's male characters. This actively illustrates that men controlled women's messages.

Along with the idea of power, the notion of beauty also shows the inferiority of women in Victorian society. Those females that met the beauty standards of the Victorian period, were praised and appreciated. They had to go to extremes to be visually pleasing and beautiful. The Victorian definition of female beauty included pale skin and a thin figure. This automatically

suggests that women were not allowed to spend time outdoors during summer time since it would have immediately resulted in a tan. Their hair was usually dyed blonde and they applied red on their lips and around their eyes (Butler, 1999).

The female sex was not respected in terms of romantic relationships either. The male characters in "The Picture of Dorian Gray" do not see love as a necessary constituent of a successful marriage. They married women from the same social class in order to keep their high social status and therefore, gain the respect of society. The male protagonists of the novel considered romance to be a socially strategic concept followed by isolation and alienation.

According to Lord Henry, eventually, everyone's marriage fails because the man will stop being interested in his wife, which will lead to the woman committing adultery. This theory confirms that men used to blame women for everything, even though women's actions were simply the consequences of their husbands' ignorance and attitudes.

Sibyl Vane is the only important female character of the novel. She plays a very special and respected role in the story: that of an actress. Since it is a form of art, acting was considered to be desirable. It was a form of providing the characters and the readers with aesthetic pleasure. The stage was the space of self-expression and possibilities, and it provided a safe frame for creativity and representation.

After seeing Sibyl's performance, Dorian Gray emphasises that the young woman is more than a single individual; she is all the heroines of the entire world. This indicates that Dorian was not interested in Sibyl's personal life, but in the multiplicity that was provided by her performances. For Dorian, Sibyl existed only on the stage and represented a fantasy created and romanticised by the male gaze.

It is possible that Wilde's female characters are portrayed as unfaithful wives to enforce the hints at homoerotic desires between Dorian Gray, Basil and Lord Henry. Their anxieties regarding their sexual tendencies were projected onto their female love interests. Dorian's feelings toward Sibyl confirm this observation because the young man develops intense feelings for the Shakespearian characters Sibyl portrays on stage. Dorian completely ignores the woman's real personality. He wants to marry the characters that Sibyl portrays but refuses to see the real person behind those characters.

In addition to this, Dorian Gray is particularly fond of Sibyl in her role as Rosalind, who presents herself as a young man. This admiration strongly contributes to Victorian men's misogynistic attitude toward women and the assumptions regarding the main character's homosexuality.

The depiction of women in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* entirely aligns with Victorian ideas regarding the female sex. Women have minimal roles both in romantic relationships and social environments, especially compared to men's roles.

Male authors during the 19th century had patriarchal beliefs and expressed them through their novels as a sign of agreeing with society's ideology regarding women. Although never publicly confirmed by the author himself, Wilde hints at his characters' homosexuality several times throughout his work. This indicates that perhaps, Oscar Wilde assigned inferiority to his female characters in order to promote romantic and sexual relationships between men, and therefore suggested the concept of homosexuality. So, by giving more value to his male characters, Wilde implicitly proposed his sexual attraction to men.

On the other hand, Wilde considered women as the potential transformers of Victorian society and recognised the most prominent aspect of a woman's character: the angels of their homes. This was a hopeless expression of a religiously crumbling period of its ideas that women could transform the world by helping men improve and become better through their spiritual knowledge and by building a so-called church in their own homes. Victorian homes were not only safe and peaceful but were considered to be sacred places. They provided shelter not only from physical injuries but from emotional pain and terror as well.

As the feminist movement arose in the 1900s, thoughts of the causes of male superiority began to correct the incorrect theories concerning both men and women. The role of both sexes was discussed widely. The theories about masculinity established ideologies that were in the favour of men, and these ideologies were constantly mirrored in society (Parker, 1995).

PART 2

THE CHARACTER OF DORIAN GRAY

It is logical to presume that Oscar Wilde used “The Picture of Dorian Gray” as a criticism of the strict and limiting hold Victorian society had on writers and common people as well. Although Victorians did not approve of such ideas and topics, Wilde decided to create characters that try to fulfil their immoral desires and seek material objects.

Dorian Gray’s qualities are connected to Greek mythology, show resemblance to the Faustian bargain and were strongly influenced by Oscar Wilde’s personal life. Dorian Gray’s character was based on a real man called John Gray, who was Wilde’s partner around the same time the Gothic novel was written and published.

In “The Picture of Dorian Gray”, the author changed John's name to Dorian. Critics assumed that it was a hint at homosexual relationships in ancient Greece.

The following part of the thesis seeks to find answers to the origins and hidden meanings behind the name and beliefs of the novel’s main character. It also focuses on Dorian Gray’s most notable qualities and defines what makes him a monster in English literature. In order to successfully examine Dorian Gray’s character and his place in literature, it is also necessary to analyse the 19th-century Victorian society and its concept of morality.

2.1. Dorian Gray’s aesthetic decadence

As each Gothic novel has a villain, it is important to examine Dorian Gray’s character. Considering his origins, he resembles a typical romantic hero. He was the son of an aristocratic woman who eloped with a man coming from a lower class. However, this romance was unacceptable: Dorian’s grandfather got rid of the young boy’s father in an evil way. This also led to the death of Dorian’s mother, leaving the boy an orphan. Therefore, Dorian was raised by his uncaring grandfather, constantly rejected and confined to a dark attic room. A childhood of such kind is characterised by misery, fear and loneliness which are considered to be basic features of a romantic hero.

At the beginning of the novel, Dorian is a youth free from pretension. He learns about the power of his beauty when a talented artist, Basil Hallward paints a portrait of him. However, his joy of discovering his own beauty quickly turns into despair when he is told about aging and the fading of outer beauty. Lord Henry is the one who urges Dorian to follow his hedonistic approach and live by the idea that only pleasure, youth and beauty are important (Wilde, 1890).

Dorian, immediately jealous of the portrait, expresses his feelings, in which he wishes to change roles with the picture. According to his words, he would rather the picture change and age with time, while he remains young and handsome.

Dorian Gray's wish resembles the bargain with the devil. Yet, the devil physically does not appear in the pact. This motive has always been common in the history of world literature, however, Wilde does not focus on the deal itself throughout the novel.

As soon as Dorian expresses his wish, he is seen as the embodiment of art. The portrait possesses a supernatural element as it is capable of acknowledging Dorian's feelings, thoughts and actions and showing his conscience.

Wilde explores hedonistic pleasures and their consequences through the main character's decaying soul and selfish decisions. Dorian Gray leads a lifestyle free of obvious consequences: even though he is evil and cruel, he stays beautiful.

The first change in the picture occurs after Dorian breaks up with Sybil, leaving the girl heartbroken and depressed. Although Dorian immediately recognises the changes in the picture, he starts wondering whether such an occurrence is possible or he is imagining it.

Dorian's reaction to his understanding of the portrait is key in his becoming of a monster. The painting shows a genuine image of his soul, forcing the young man to acknowledge the weight and consequences of his own actions. Despite the fact that Dorian's wish to remain youthful and beautiful came true, he is displeased with the flaws of the portrait he is in possession of.

Finally, Dorian comes to the conclusion that in order to keep the painting as beautiful as it was, he should repress his sinful desires. He decides to use the portrait as a means of bettering himself. The youth convinces himself that he can live a life free of sins.

However, he cannot free himself of Lord Henry's influence. Unfortunately, this resolution does not last long. No matter how much Dorian tries to distance himself from the elder man, Lord Henry plays a constant role in his life. As much as Lord Henry claims to lose himself in pleasure, he does not entirely commit to his own ideas. This trait makes him look naive to the depth of Dorian Gray's manipulation whose increasing ignorance of morality leads to his downfall. While the youth follows the principles of hedonism, people around him do not believe the sins he committed because of his beautiful appearance; however, the portrait reveals his real character.

Thus, Dorian starts regularly visiting infamous places in the East End in order to satisfy his desires which were seen as deviant sexual behaviour during the Victorian era. As homosexuality was criminalised, Wilde decided to employ a common gothic body known as

the double. The double is an aspect of the main character's unstable identity (Dryden, 2005). In this case, the painting represents Dorian's real face while he enjoys the horrible pleasure of a double life, appearing innocent and handsome in the eyes of the public.

While the implication of Dorian's actions are disguised by his outer appearance, his hidden portrait exposes the truth. The young hedonist cannot reverse his sins and the portrait's honesty, which keeps revealing the remainder of his moral values. Its hideous appearance prods at Dorian's mind, and the youth, someone who has sought pleasure and outer beauty, is exposed to the fact that his soul is degrading.

This represents that Dorian starts growing into a Gothic villain. His reputation is damaged as there are rumours about him, he becomes strange and mysterious, and he stops showing up for his friends. However, he is certainly not a dominant Gothic villain (Garrett, 2003). He echoes Lord Henry's thoughts, ideas and desires concerning the priorities of one's life. The elder man consciously points Dorian to the path of indecency, immorality and sinfulness. Dorian Gray quickly falls under the destructive spell of Lord Henry. However, as Dorian tries to hold on to his outer appearance and youth, he eventually loses his morality.

Despite Dorian Gray's protagonist status and the fact that throughout the entire book, he is the one who gets involved in committing different sins, his horrible fate can be associated with Lord Henry's bewitching speeches. Lord Henry is a great example of a man practising nonchalant, decadent desires. He views Dorian Gray as an experiment and constantly analyses him and the consequences of his immoral actions. The older man vividly reaches a state of pleasure from seeing how easily Dorian can be manipulated.

In addition to this, Dorian's youthfulness motivates him to further separate from his own soul. His beauty liberates him from the moral limitations society has established. Following Lord Henry's theory that enjoyment should be sought after, Dorian keeps immersing himself in pleasurable and sensual activities.

Ultimately, the main character realises the loss of his soul but cannot seek redemption because of his selfish nature. Dorian Gray's hedonistic philosophy and his pursuit of beauty and pleasure have ruined his moral conscience.

"The Picture of Dorian Gray" is a great example of aesthetic concepts. The main character is a paradigm of the Aesthetic movement's fixation on youth and beauty as well as the lack of moral values.

2.2. Aestheticism, hedonism and morality

The novel's title character possesses none of the classical, external qualities of a monster that most readers are used to. Dorian Gray lacks the physical flaws that the world literature's typical monsters, such as Frankenstein's monster, the Dementors or Medusa exhibit (Smith, 2004). As a matter of fact, at first glance he does not have any flaws at all: Dorian is a living example of beauty personified. His perfection is definitely the quality that differentiates him from others. Although people around him grow old and lose their beauty, Dorian remains as young and perfect as at the beginning of the novel.

Dorian Gray's outer appearance might remain flawless throughout the entire story, but his life is full of sins. Moreover, he slowly starts to completely give in to his monstrous habits and tendencies.

Before examining Dorian Gray's unethical behaviour in-depth, it is important to determine the concept of Victorian morality. Although Dorian's life is considered to be immoral both by most of the novel's characters and by the readers of the Victorian period, morality is not a crystal clear notion, nor an accurate indicator of good vs. evil. Morality varies between different communities and people; what is moral to a priest dedicating his entire life to his religion and God may not be what is moral to a liberal homosexual teenager. Morality will always have its own meaning to each individual.

Therefore, Dorian's idea of morality is different from each reader's. Growing up in Victorian England, he was probably strongly influenced by religious morality and the importance of rational thinking. At the beginning of the novel, these ideas are clearly shown in the way Dorian thinks and acts. However, as soon as he meets Lord Henry, his views on what is right and wrong change dramatically.

This depicts that Dorian's moral values are influenced by two factors in his life: his upbringing and his relationship with Lord Henry, both of which try to control Dorian's mind and actions. The novel, meant as a reflection of right and wrong, supports the traditional Victorian values and ideas rather than Lord Henry's philosophy (Paterson, 2008).

The fact that Dorian keeps his portrait in a dark room is significant in the way that this is the same place where Basil's death occurs. The core of Dorian's moral degradation and corruption can be found in the midst of his childhood trauma and misery, eventually destroying the teachings that used to make the young man's soul innocent and pure. Each time Dorian wants to look at the portrait, it is inevitable for him to remember his childhood, as the room itself is an untouched link to his past.

Taking his immoral actions into account, there is a big possibility that Dorian is attempting to escape the boundaries that Victorian society has set for him. The majority of moralist societies were strict and limiting, where people were not allowed to act on their desires (Altick, 1973). Homosexuality, now being accepted and beginning to be considered normal, was seen as not only a huge sin but a crime as well. Intimate relationships between men in the Victorian era was considered to be an open secret. Everyone knew that it was happening. However, no one could directly mention it among polite people or in newspapers. As homosexuality was unacceptable to be talked about in public places, it was common for people to have outright prejudice and homophobia. Loneliness, silence and guilt were the most usual oppressive forms among homosexual people.

Public display of homosexual acts received more backlash than the actual practice of such acts. Victorian society forbade the discussion of homosexuality publicly due to its indecency. In order to avoid any public scandals, Victorians tolerated homoeroticism as long as homosexuals kept it private, specifically if it concerned upper-class people. However, keeping it private was never Oscar Wilde's plan.

Wilde's decadent attitude was shaped by the impact of several cultures and manifested itself in different forms. He emphasised the pursuit of passionate relationships, sensuality, and was a big fan of Greek mythology and its characters, which the Puritans in England were not ready to accept. The French decadent movement influenced Wilde's behaviour as well. The writer showed great appreciation for French culture and its definition of beauty. French people were not as prudish and conservative as the English desired to be viewed.

Oscar Wilde believed that the admiration he felt toward male beauty was the continuation of Greek people's love for the same thing, only in the modern age. The author tried to express the concept of such love in his novel, however, he clearly failed to do so. This definition of love was revisited in "The Picture of Dorian Gray" both in Basil and Dorian's relationship and in Lord Henry's education relationship with the young man.

The writer described this love with references to Greek mythology, the Bible and also Renaissance texts from England and Italy. Wilde tried to explain to the public that his admiration of the aesthetic beauty of men required intellectuality, philosophy and innocence.

Homoeroticism intensifies the aesthetic narcissism and monstrous qualities of Dorian Gray's decadence. The concept of homosexuality was considered to be entirely against nature, Victorian society and its conservative ideas, turns it into a pleasure aligned with the requirements of decadence.

According to the heteronormative judgment of the Victorian period and Christianity, homosexuality was viewed as pointless not only because of its status against the society's norms but due to its inability to procreate as well. This leads to homosexuality coinciding with art and aesthetics and becoming a perfect preoccupation for the decadent characters. Dorian Gray's identity can be defined by the formulation of the connection between decadence and homoeroticism. The manner through which the protagonist looks at himself is reliant on the sexual desire and outer validation he receives from Basil Hallward and Lord Henry.

However, Dorian is not the main representative of homosexual desires and feelings with which the novel has always been associated. Instead, Dorian is the submissive, passive object of other men's homoerotic desires. The story's environment is characterised by feminine language and hidden homoerotic feelings. The effeminate traits of the characters, their interest in male beauty and Basil Hallward's obvious obsession and love for Dorian Gray make up for the small fragment the youth has in the category of homosexual relationships.

Basil Hallward's sexuality was considered to be a threat to Victorian society. He represented homosexual desires, but one that referred to the language of art. This language of art started to appear during the *fin de siècle*. It represented homoerotic acts and desires, however, its usage was forbidden in the novels.

As an artist, Basil Hallward was able to express his homosexual feelings through his artworks, especially Dorian Gray's picture. In fact, the artist's life is characterised by mysterious acts which he considered to be pleasurable. However, these activities are not revealed throughout the novel.

Furthermore, Basil's feelings for the young man represent the pure Greek admiration for male beauty. Just like the artist does not want anyone to get between him and Dorian, he also wants to protect the portrait from the public eye.

There were several styles, habits and other qualities associated with homosexuality, just like there are today. Writers used stereotypical traits to describe some of their characters as homosexuals. Some of these stereotypical traits are present even nowadays: lisps, feminine men and more. Even a lot of inexplicable adjectives referred to homosexuality, such as languid and earnest.

It is logical to assume that Oscar Wilde used his novel as a criticism of the strict hold his society had on its people. He chose his main character to have a life full of pleasures and fulfilled desires, regardless of Victorian people's thoughts on his actions.

Nevertheless, Dorian knows that many of the sins he has committed are punishable and decides to hide the reflection of his immoral actions behind closed doors while he acts as a

polite gentleman throughout the day. Whether this is due to the guilt he feels or the fear of the consequences cannot be determined for certain. However, in either case, it illustrates the invisible chains that the norms of Victorian society have on his life.

The Victorian era is known for its strict rules regarding one's appearance and morality. Society expected people to be flawless, or at least to appear so. This led to people living a double life, just like the main character of Oscar Wilde's novel. People attempted to hide their flaws in order to be accepted and liked by society. Sexual repression was very common during this time as well (Foucault, 1978).

Although "The Picture of Dorian Gray" is a fictional story, it was based on Victorian society. Basil represses his own sexuality and feelings for Dorian, because, living in the Victorian period, he knows that society would judge and punish him.

Dorian Gray's monstrous qualities are shown in different aspects of his personality and habits, such as his drug addiction, sexual deviancy, loneliness, incapability of true love as well as his priorities, values and, eventually, his murder.

Furthermore, it is important to note that besides Lord Henry, Basil Hallward had a huge impact on Dorian's life too. As stated in the novel, it all started with Basil's desire to create Dorian's portrait, which eventually led to his immoral actions.

Lord Henry and Basil bear a resemblance to two well-known characters: the angel and the devil appearing on one's shoulders. While Lord Henry tries to take control over Dorian's mind with his theories and immoral ideas and is amused by how these might affect the youth's life, Basil acts out of love, usually disagreeing with Lord Henry's statements.

The Faustian pact is adapted in the novel as Dorian trades his soul for eternal beauty, influenced by his demonic mentor, Lord Henry.

The pact Dorian makes with the devil, even though the latter is not physically in the novel, is very similar to the Faustian pact because the tempting, influential demonic figure inspires the creation of the pact. The human desires for both Dorian and Faust bring out such discontent that they are willing to give up their values and morals to achieve their selfish goals. Dorian desires eternal beauty and youth, while Faust wishes to gain eternal knowledge and experience.

Both *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Faust* are divided into two bigger parts. In the first part of Oscar Wilde's novel, Dorian wishes to look young forever. Also, he meets Sibyl Vane. Dorian becomes friends with Lord Henry as well. He slowly starts falling under his influence. In the first part of *Faust*, the readers are introduced to the main character's love interest, Gretchen. Faust also makes his pact with Mephistopheles.

In the second part of both works, Faust and Dorian take the road to immorality which eventually leads to their self-destruction. Dorian's relationship with Sibyl Vane and her suicide correlates to Gretchen's storyline in Faust. Sibyl and Gretchen both fall in love with the main characters of the novels. However, Dorian and Faust eventually reject them. This rejection drives them into madness.

Beginning with Dorian Gray's first conversation with Lord Henry, the older man makes Dorian afraid of growing old. His words inspire the pact that Dorian makes in order to stay youthful and handsome. Lord Henry's witty expressions almost make him look like he has a satanic spirit in him.

Before the reader is even introduced to the title character, one reads Basil and Lord Henry's discussion about the young Dorian Gray. Basil immediately admits that he does not want Lord Henry and Dorian to meet, fearing that the elder man would ruin his life for him.

However, Lord Henry is described as a charming, persuasive character, which is obviously appealing to a young man. Lord Henry's qualities are enough for Dorian to become interested in the man's theories, leaving Basil's definition of good behind.

Dorian Gray's character is obviously connected to Greek mythology. His outer appearance is the most prominent thing about him, and it eventually becomes his defense against his actions.

Throughout the novel, Dorian even gets worshipped, as Basil becomes mesmerised by him and treats him as his most valuable muse. Unlike Basil, who appreciates beauty and art, Lord Henry does not seem satisfied with simply admiring it. He is not fine with simply admiring the young boy's beauty but feels the need to violate him through his thoughts and ideas.

In addition to this, Lord Henry's presence when Dorian decides to trade his soul for eternal beauty is an important symbol in the novel. It can be assumed that Lord Henry represents the devil himself, being the one to not only influence Dorian Gray, but to accept the bargain as well.

While the three characters play completely different roles, Basil, Lord Henry and Gray are each responsible for the monsters that eventually appear in the story - both the man and the painting. A very complex look at the novel is presented by placing the readers into a story that has already started, with several creators already having the responsibility for a creation that is not even developed yet.

When the novel opens, Basil already has a responsibility for the youth's eventual downfall. Basil Hallward is fascinated by the painting. He sees, both in Dorian and his portrait, only beauty, and it makes him deny the young man's immorality for a long time.

The tenth chapter of the novel contains two sentences that reveal how important Basil's part was: "Yes, Basil could have saved him. But it was too late now." (Wilde, 1890). Wilde illustrates that Basil is Dorian's failed saviour. Basil's death symbolises not only Dorian's cruelty but him killing the last piece of good and dignity in his own soul, practically destroying the angel advocating for goodness on his shoulder.

The novel is the representation of Dorian Gray's spiritual journey, his struggle between good and bad. This conflict soon becomes evident to the readers by the opposite forces that Basil Hallward and Lord Henry represent. These two characters try to win over Dorian's soul.

Dorian's character represents a man who is constantly tempted by two different sides. He is the only person in the novel who has to make a decision regarding his ideologies and theories. Both Basil and Lord Henry have chosen different sides, which means that they do not have to choose between good and evil anymore. These two characters represent the costs of choosing one path rather than the other one.

Therefore, if Dorian had followed Basil's path of moral values and the appreciation of beauty, he would not have committed sins. If he had chosen to live by Lord Henry's theories, he would not have felt guilt and remorse. However, Dorian is the middleman in the novel's central conflict. The youth is unable to suppress his regret but cannot ignore his desires either. Dorian does not choose a side, but represents the middleman whose dilemma takes control over his whole life.

"The Picture of Dorian Gray" is valuable because it presents a significant relationship between the creator and his creation. Humanity is repeatedly pulled between the forces of right and wrong and must take responsibility for the monsters it creates in order to prevent fatal failure. The story of Dorian Gray is compelling because it challenges the readers to look into their own lives.

Oscar Wilde draws on personal experiences, different literary themes and sources in his novel. "The Picture of Dorian Gray" includes many themes, ideas and motifs. Wilde applies the Faustian bargain and the constant battle between right and wrong, two common themes used in literary works.

The Faustian bargain emphasises Dorian Gray's dilemma of having to choose a path. He is stuck between Basil's moral principles and Lord Henry's fascinating theories.

It is also important to mention that the creation's failure brings the downfall of the creator as well. This cycle is presented in "The Picture of Dorian Gray". Oscar Wilde's novel can be used as a warning to the readers: those creators who do not look after their creations, or simply cannot due to their personal issues, eventually will have to face the failure of their creations and the monstrous consequences of it.

2.3. Gender roles in The Picture of Dorian Gray

The novel can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of the two sides of Oscar Wilde's personality. Dorian can be viewed as an archetypal image by which both sides appear on the surface. This suggests that his actions symbolise Wilde's inner thoughts and feelings.

Furthermore, Dorian is characterised by his obsession with beauty and art. He escapes from every unpleasant situation by turning his attention to art. He is unwilling to admit that his actions have consequences, so he seeks refuge in beauty, including paintings, literature and music.

For instance, on hearing of Sibyl Vane's suicide, he accepts an invitation to go to the opera that same night. Thus, Dorian tries to see life from an aesthetic perspective.

This kind of attitude leads to him constantly "stepping outside" his own experiences in order to view them from a safe distance. Instead of experiencing his life, he starts observing it like he would in a theatre. A few years later, Dorian does not even feel like he is part of his own life. He becomes an observer: what he sees is a projection of the bizarre, scary shape that his own personality has become.

In addition to the above-mentioned, Sybil's death foreshadows everything that Dorian is going to lose throughout the novel: his beauty and youth, as well as his innocence and moral sense. Sibyl Vane's life is characterised by the features of melodrama: a naive girl seduced by a selfish man.

Sibyl deals with every situation the same way Dorian does: she uses art and imagination to forget her sorrow. The young girl overcomes the pain of parting from her older brother, James, with improvised imaginary scenarios about his successful, fortunate future - a feature also taken from melodrama.

At the beginning of the novel, Dorian assumes that he has been granted everything to enjoy life. However, he is afraid of life. Consequently, he tries to escape from it with the help of the philosophical study of art and drama.

In addition to this, Dorian Gray was based on a real person called John Gray, who was Oscar Wilde's lover around the time the Gothic novel was published. According to Neil McKenna (2005), an author of Wilde's biography that focuses on his personal relationships claims that John Gray was an exceptionally charming man. Gray's dream was to become a poet and London's bohemian art scene attracted him, where he eventually met different writers and artists, including Oscar Wilde.

Although Wilde was popular among men, Gray was not interested in him at first. Thus, Wilde kept sending him presents and giving constant attention to John Gray. Finally, the young man consented to become Wilde's lover. The relationship between two men put them in a vulnerable position since all kinds of homosexual acts were considered illegal in Victorian England.

According to Joseph Pearce (2004), Oscar Wilde considered his homosexual lifestyle as "sexual madness" and "monstrous perversion" and also confessed to feeling guilty for his actions, since being homosexual was considered a crime during his time. He portrayed homosexuality in his works and managed to give it the same care as one would to heterosexuality, however, he failed to stand up for his own beliefs and sexual orientation in his personal life.

In the novel, Wilde changed John's name to Dorian. It suggests the meaning of homosexual relationships in ancient Greece, notably the one where an older man becomes both the lover and teacher of the youth (McKenna, 2005). This fact indicates that the name 'Dorian' represents the relationship between Oscar Wilde and John Gray. However, except for their surname, John Gray and Dorian Gray are not similar in anything else (Pearce, 2004).

Furthermore, the choice of the title character's name also shows the relationship between the main characters of the novel: Basil and Dorian, as well as Lord Henry and Dorian. Basil and Lord Henry can be viewed as the elder intellectuals, while Dorian is the inexperienced youth.

Each character is sensual and artistic like Oscar Wilde. Because of his passion for art and aesthetic taste, many consider Wilde as a person who seeks pleasure and joy, just like Dorian or Lord Henry.

The Victorian upper class were considered to be hedonistic, disloyal and immoral. Among the aristocracy, different sexual affairs were tolerated as long as they did not become public. As they were highly educated, aristocratic men were familiar with the homosexual themes in ancient Greek and Roman works. These texts provided an acceptable model for the

upper-class homosexuals in Victorian England: it did not damage one's masculinity, a trait that was particularly important for aristocratic men (Pedley, 1990).

While upper-class men focused on their reputation by listening to the opinion of others, middle-class men prioritised self-improvement based on religion and moral sense. Also, whereas aristocratic men claimed that the pursuit of pleasure was the most important goal in one's life, the middle class was afraid that immoral actions might ruin their social status.

For those who campaigned for moral purity in the 1800s, homosexuality and prostitution were an issue of equal concern. According to the campaigners, these two matters were both markers of a society's shameful morals.

The most prominent traits of Victorian young men were manliness and strength. Both these qualities were opposite to the idea of homosexuality, which was considered to be a symbol of effeminacy.

In addition to the statement made previously, Dorian Gray shows a lot of resemblance with Oscar Wilde himself, particularly in the way he experienced the aesthetic values. Through the story, Wilde was able to express his own aesthetic ideas and theories, covering them in dialogues between the characters.

On the other hand, through Basil Hallward's character, Wilde attempts to show his real nature. This suggests that despite not showing it publicly, he considered himself to be a caring and moral person during his lifetime.

In the middle of the novel, the most affectionate lines come from Basil. The scene where he confesses his love for Dorian is the most obvious evidence of his homosexuality.

Moreover, in the original, untouched version of the novel, there are additional lines to the confession. Basil passionately expresses his homosexual desires for Dorian Gray: "I have worshipped you with far more romance of feeling than a man usually gives to a friend. Somehow, I had never loved a woman... I quite admit that I adored you madly, extravagantly, absurdly" (Wilde, 2007). These lines were eliminated from the published novel, however, their existence would come to have a huge influence on Oscar Wilde's life in the future.

Lord Henry has a huge influence on Dorian Gray as well. As the story moves forward, the psychological connection of the two men grows stronger. The youth is fascinated by Lord Henry's hedonist theories and starts following them. Thus, by the end of the story, he is not the naive boy with a pure soul anymore. Basil is the only one who mourns the loss of Dorian's morality.

Lord Henry's claims that only young people are desirable coincides with the views of homosexuals in the 19th century. In ancient Greece, people believed that one can be desired

and admired by a man only during one's youth. Relationships between older men were constantly looked down upon.

However, Lord Henry takes the role of a pedagogue toward Dorian Gray and his corruption. Lord Henry shows Dorian different ways of thinking, which makes Dorian even more intrigued. When the older man realises this, he feels pleased to have such control over someone.

The paederast educational system was based on an older man being a mentor to a younger one, which leads to him having the more dominant and active part in the relationship. Throughout the novel, Dorian is the passive one in this relationship: he takes each piece of advice Lord Henry gives him, and follows them without hesitation.

However, as the story progresses, Dorian dominates his relationships with younger men. He is even accused of having a huge influence and corrupting them. It is implied that Dorian led young men down the wrong path. This mirrors the corruption that Lord Henry had upon his character as well.

Secrecy and embarrassment are important issues in the novel. These two terms are also automatically connected with the homosexual community. The reason behind this is that homosexuality has been seen as gross and even evil throughout our history (Dowling, 1994).

Oscar Wilde's novel has a sense of disguise in each character's personality, their thoughts, feelings and actions. Only a few confessions were made by the characters, however, these still leave the readers wondering what is the actual meaning behind them.

By placing the three men in the homosexual world which Oscar Wilde believed he belonged to, the writer himself appears to explore the real meaning of beauty and art with the characters. Through the thoughts and actions of the characters, Wilde suggests that the real beauty of a person's soul would eventually be destroyed by their own egotism. Thus, the desire for pleasure and temporary happiness leads to the loss of one's moral sense. According to the author, the thing people should follow is not their strong desire, but their inner nature, including their morals, principles and values.

PART 3

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

3.1. Participants of the research

The participants of the research were 11th-grade pupils of different secondary schools of Beregovo, Transcarpathia, Ukraine. Four schools were chosen, two with the Hungarian language of instruction and two with the Ukrainian language of instruction. The survey was carried out in the following schools: Kossuth Lajos Lyceum, Horvath Anna Grammar School, Fedir Potushnyak Lyceum, and Taras Shevchenko Lyceum.

A total of sixty-seven students took part in the survey. This comprised thirty-nine female and twenty-eight male participants. The participants belonged to the same age group. In total, thirty-two participants studied in schools with the Hungarian language of instruction mentioned before, while thirty-five studied in the schools with the Ukrainian language of instruction.

All the classes were heterogeneous. The participants have been guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity in the research.

3.2. Research instruments

The instrument of the empirical research was a questionnaire. Each participant received a questionnaire consisting of twenty-two questions based on Oscar Wilde's biography and his most famous novel "The Picture of Dorian Gray".

The questions required different forms of answers:

- multiple-choice answers
- short answers
- checkboxes
- paragraphs

The survey form contained questions that required specific facts and knowledge on the topic from the participants. The questions regarding their knowledge of literature were divided into the following two parts:

- Oscar Wilde's life and literary works

- The main themes, characters and plot of “The Picture of Dorian Gray”

It also contained confidential questions related to the participants’ mindsets and ideologies.

The research data was based on statistics, diagrams, descriptions, and comparisons. Most of the questions required a deep knowledge of “The Picture of Dorian Gray” as well as the author’s biography. The questions also dealt with the most common subjects and problems in modern society.

The questionnaire aimed at being thought-provoking that contained diverse questions. Thus, a detailed description could be given of the knowledge young people have about 19th-century literature as well as the 21st-century matters that affect the youth. All the questionnaires were prepared in two languages. Pupils of the schools with the Hungarian language of instruction were given the questionnaires in Hungarian language, while pupils of the schools with the Ukrainian language of instruction received them in Ukrainian language.

3.3. Procedures of the research

The procedure of the research started with creating a questionnaire appropriate for 11th-grade students: the questions were based on the knowledge they presumably acquired during their school years.

According to the curriculum issued by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, pupils of the 2021/2022 academic year are required to read “The Picture of Dorian Gray” by Oscar Wilde. The writer’s biography and the novel are part of the world literature curriculum in secondary schools.

Furthermore, the survey focused on the participants’ personal opinions regarding today’s biggest questions, including homosexuality, morals, and beauty in the age of social media.

In order to create an appropriate and accurate survey, it was reviewed by the supervisor of this thesis.

The research was carried out in four Transcarpathian secondary schools. The research was conducted with the permission of the leadership of each school. It was carried out among 11th-grade students. The headmasters, teachers and students all agreed to this.

Students of two schools with the Hungarian language of instruction and two schools with the Ukrainian language of instruction were asked to fill out the questionnaires. The

participants were granted anonymity and confidentiality regarding their answers. They were given 45 minutes to answer the questions. The survey was carried out in Hungarian and Ukrainian languages since its main goal was to evaluate the knowledge of students of schools with Hungarian and Ukrainian languages of instruction. The test was conducted after the classes to avoid interfering with any of the classes and in order not to distract the students from their learning process.

The process of the research, which was conducted face-to-face, lasted for a month. It started in early November and ended in the first week of December 2021.

Finally, each school was visited. The questionnaires were handed to the participants of the research. The answers were collected and analysed with the help of diagrams and tables.

3.4. Findings of the research

The first question examines the gender distribution of those who took the survey. Of the 67 participants who filled out the questionnaire thirty-nine (58.2%) were female and twenty-eight (41.8%) were male.

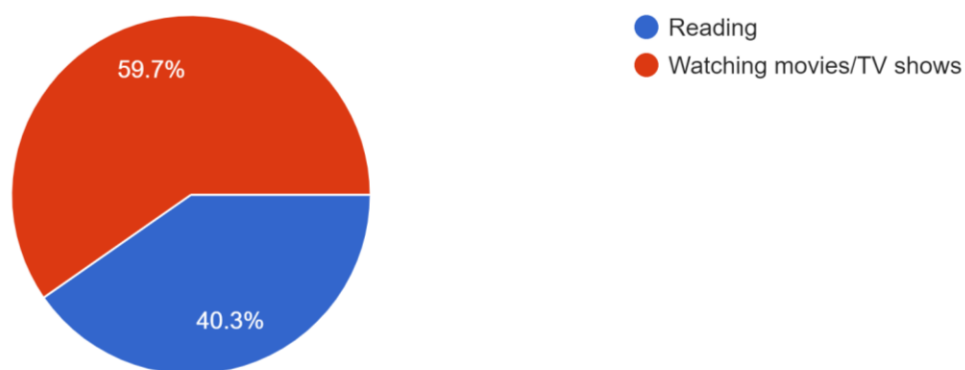
Table 1

	Number	Percentage
Female	thirty-nine	58.2%
Male	twenty-eight	41.8%

The second question studies whether the participants enjoy reading or watching movies and TV shows more.

Diagram

1

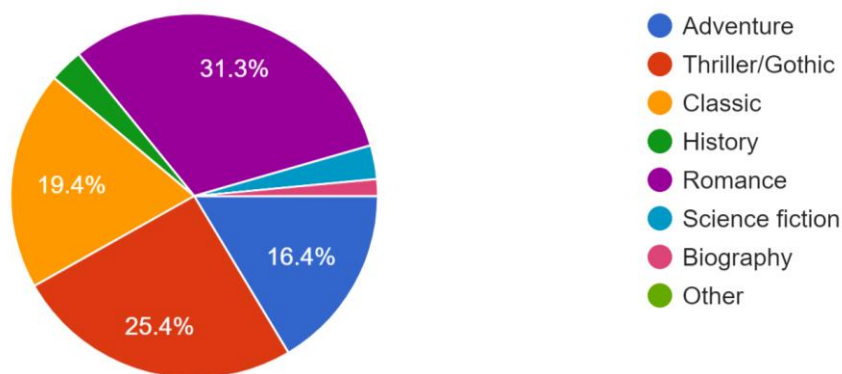


The majority of the respondents prefer watching movies and TV shows to reading. This question required subjective answers where the participants had to explain their opinions. Among the explanations about why they prefer one activity to the other the most common were that they did not have enough free time to read a book, while watching a movie or a TV show is a quicker way to wind down after school or during the weekends.

Those, on the other hand, who opted for reading said that a book serves as an escape from the real world, while sitting in front of a computer or TV screen does not.

The next question examines what kind of books the participants enjoy reading the most.

Diagram 2



According to the answers, the majority of the participants (31.3%) enjoy romance, 25.4% thriller or gothic, 19.4% classic, 16.4% adventure novels. 3% of the respondents chose science fiction and history books, while only 1.5% chose biography books.

The responses show that from classic literature to biographies, there is a book out there for each person to enjoy.

The fourth question was the following: does your mood usually affect the kind of books you read? (E.g. bad mood = books with a sad plot to match your mood or, on the contrary, easy reads to make you feel better).

Here, the participants had to articulate their own thoughts and opinions. According to the answers, many choose to read a book in order to improve their mood or their mental health in general.

Mental health is one of the most common topics people talk about nowadays. Illnesses that affect our mental stability and well-being are being taken more seriously. This leads to conversations about the causes, symptoms and consequences that mental health issues might have on our everyday lives.

In the next question, the participants had to choose their favourite literary character.

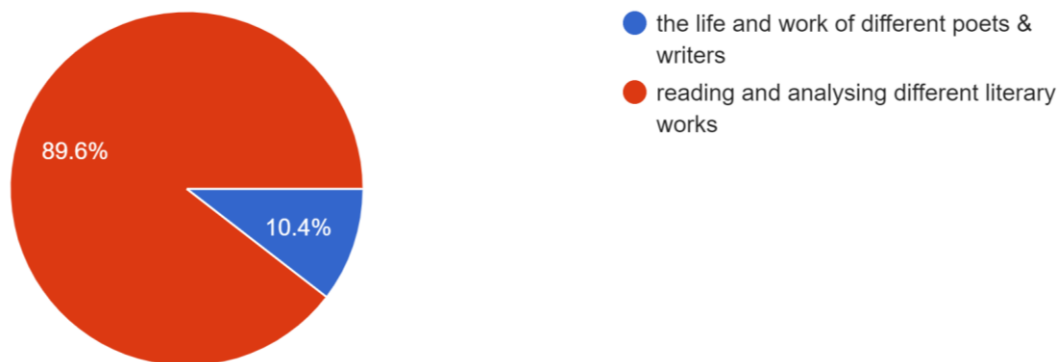
Among the answers, the most common were the following:

- Hermione Granger
- the March sisters
- Jon Snow

The characters that the participants listed confirm their answers for the third question that examined the genre of book they enjoy reading the most. Most of the characters are from romance, classic and adventure novels.

The sixth question examined which part of literature the participants find more interesting: the life and work of different poets and writers or reading and analysing different literary works.

Diagram 3

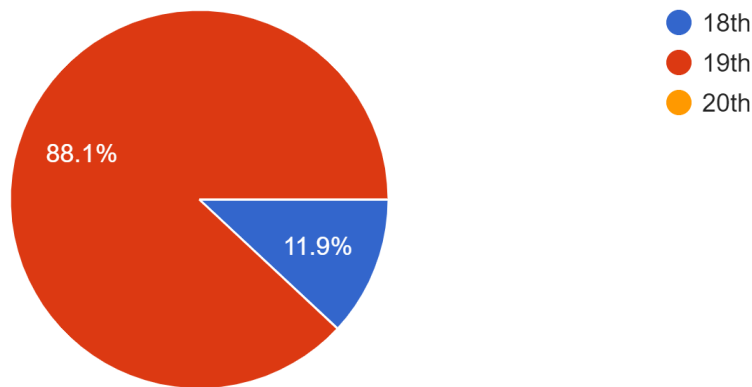


In the next question, the in-depth examination of the participants' knowledge about Oscar Wilde started. The first question related to the writer studied whether the students knew which century Wilde lived in.

The participants could choose between the following three answers:

- 18th century
- 19th century
- 20th century

Diagram 4

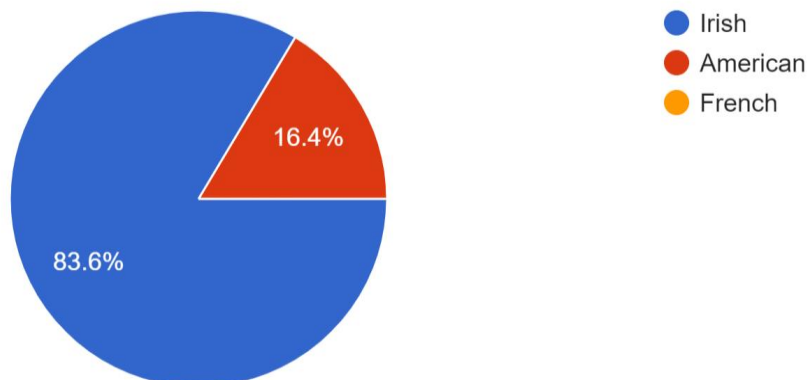


As the results show, 88.1% of the respondents chose the correct answer, while 11.9% did not.

The next question studied whether the participants knew what ethnicity Oscar Wilde was. They could choose between the following three answers:

- Irish
- American
- French

Diagram 5



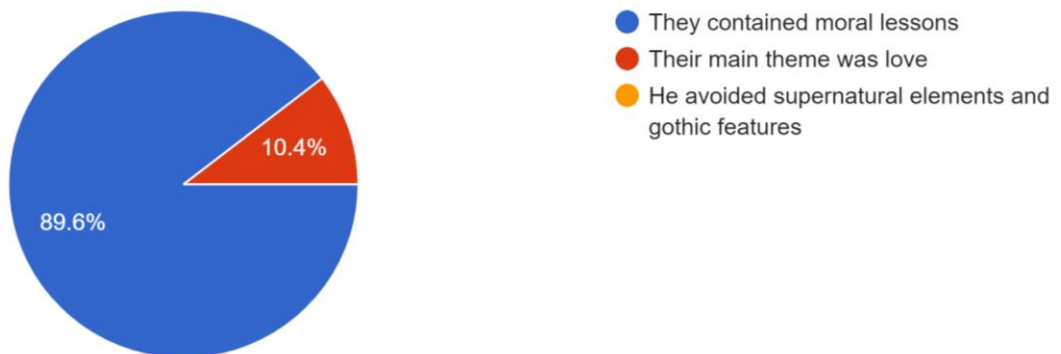
The diagram shows that the majority of the participants (83.6%) chose the correct answer, while 16.4% chose the second option, which was incorrect. According to this, it is clear that the students eliminated the third option and knew that Oscar Wilde used English language in his everyday life and in his works as well.

Similarly to the previous two questions, the next one offered three answers the participants could choose from. This question examined whether the students have read Oscar Wilde's novels by asking them what characterised his works.

The possible answers were the following:

- They contained moral lessons
- Their main theme was love
- He avoided supernatural elements and gothic features

Diagram 6



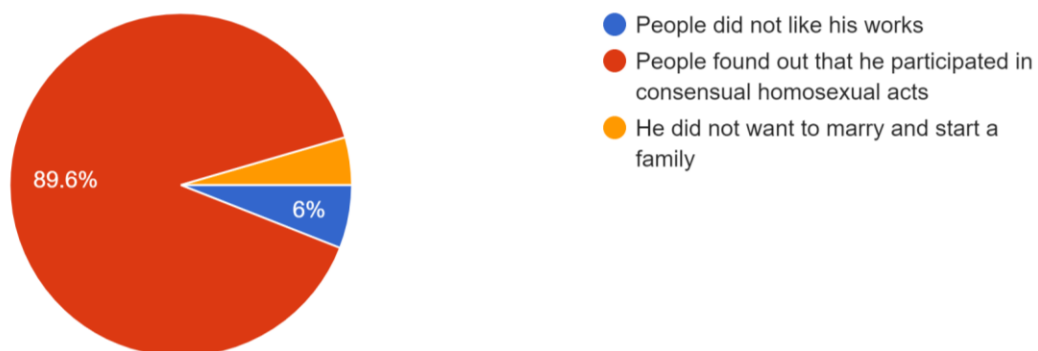
As the results show, 89.6% of participants knew that one of the main characteristics of Wilde's novels was that they dealt with the subject of morality, including the importance of moral values and the consequences of immoral actions. The remaining 10.4% chose the second option, saying that the main theme of the novels was love.

In the tenth question, the participants had to recall information about Oscar Wilde's personal life. The writer was judged and laughed at by other people, and it was forbidden to say his name out loud.

The participants of the questionnaire had to determine the reason behind this, choosing from the three following options:

- People did not like his works
- People found out that he participated in consensual homosexual acts
- He did not want to marry and start a family

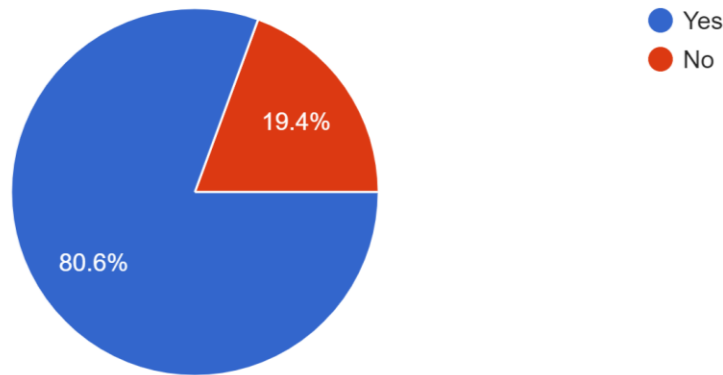
Diagram 7



The diagram shows that 89.6% of the participants responded correctly, choosing the second option, while the remainder 10.4% chose the first and third option, both incorrect.

In the next question, the participants were asked whether they had learned about Oscar Wilde and his best-known novel called *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in school.

Diagram 8



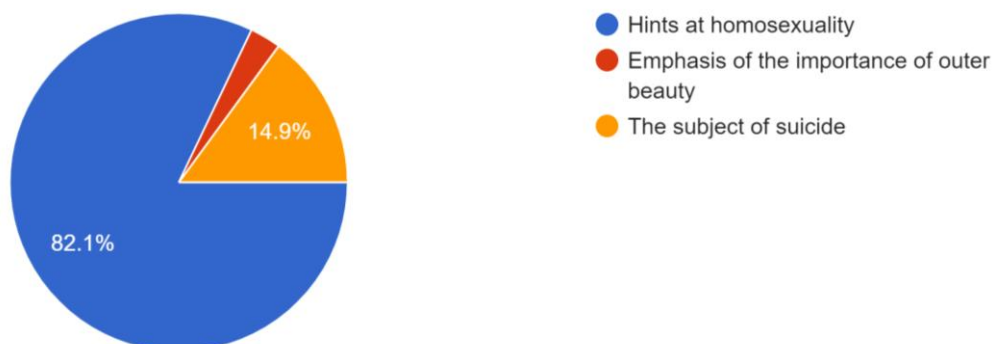
According to the participants' answers, 80.6% of them learned about Oscar Wilde and his novels in school, while 19.4% of them did not, even though it is part of the school curriculum in each school that the survey was conducted in.

The next question contained the date of the publication of "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*" (1890). This was important because the question explored whether the participants had an overall knowledge of the values and norms of 19th-century society. The students had to determine what the editors eliminated from the novel before its publication.

The possible answers were the following:

- Hints at homosexuality
- Emphasis on the importance of outer beauty
- The subject of suicide

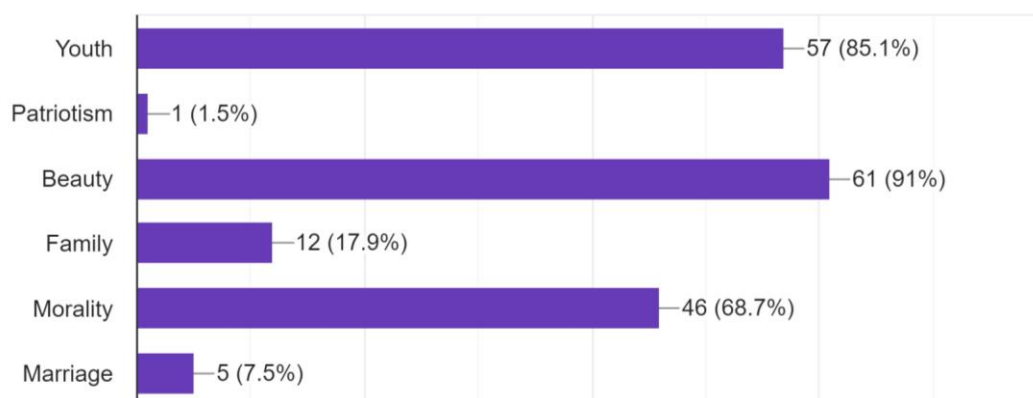
Diagram 9



As the results show, 82.1% of the participants answered correctly, while 14.9% chose the third option and the remainder 3% the second one. The second and third options were incorrect since the whole book revolves around the importance of outer beauty and youth, and suicide is a recurring theme throughout the novel.

The following question examined the participants' knowledge about *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Each respondent had to choose the main themes of the novel. There were different themes listed below this question, from which the participants were able to choose more than one. The answers were the following:

Table 2



From the answers above, the following three were correct: youth, beauty and morality. As the results show, most of the participants had knowledge of the main themes of the novel, while 26.9% answered incorrectly: 17.9% chose “family”; 7.5% chose “marriage”; 1.5% chose “patriotism” as one of the main topics of “*The Picture of Dorian Gray*”.

As mentioned before, the survey studied the participants' personal opinions as well.

The next question contained the following: according to the respondents, could the uncensored version of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* be published in the 21st century? What is the difference between the ideology of the 19th-century and the 21st-century readers?

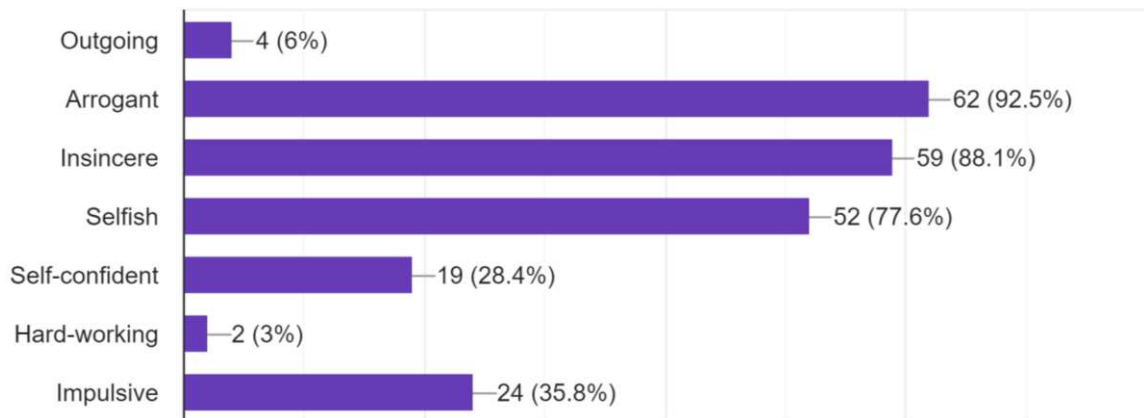
The majority of the participants were certain that the novel could be published today without any particular changes being made to it. The treatment of mental illnesses such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorders as well as the acceptance of different sexualities have become part of our society. These topics are no longer ignored or frowned upon.

Furthermore, when it came to determining the differences between 19th-century and 21st-century readers the answer was unanimous: people are less judgemental and more open-minded in this day and age. Topics and ideas that were unacceptable or inappropriate centuries

ago are being written and talked about on a daily basis now. This allows our society to have more knowledge and a wider range of experience.

The next question focused on Dorian Gray’s character, particularly his personality and attitude. The participants had to list the main qualities of the title character. The answers were the following:

Table 3

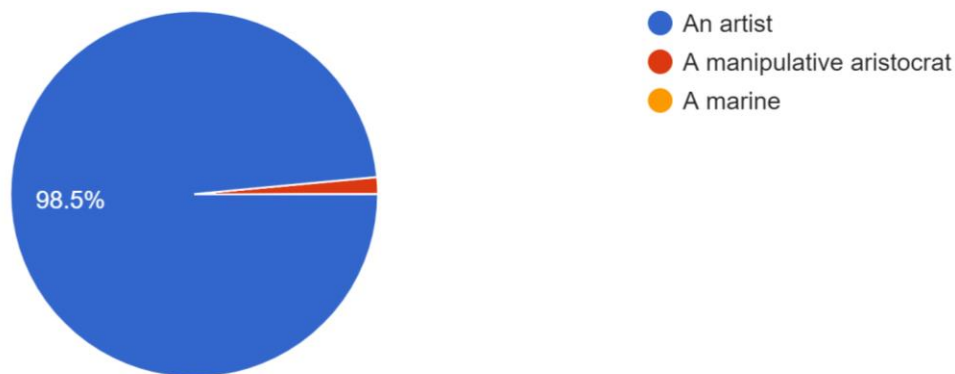


According to the answers, most of the participants saw Dorian Gray as an arrogant character. The second most common answer was “insincere”, followed by “selfish”. By collecting these answers, it was possible to determine that the main character of “The Picture of Dorian Gray” was seen as a negative character.

In the next question, the participants had to determine who Basil Hallward was. They could choose from the possible answers below:

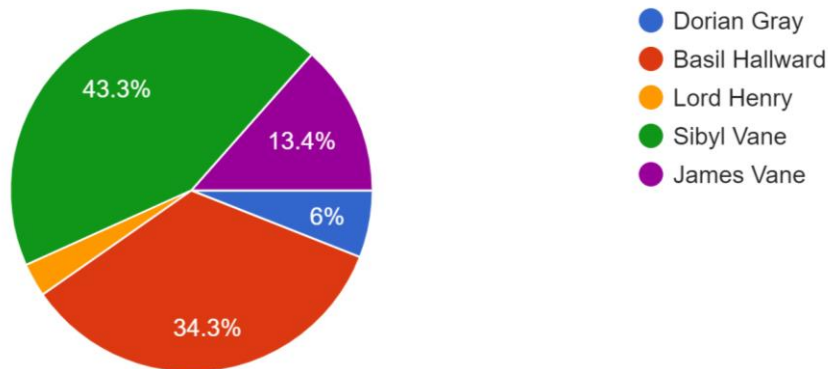
- An artist
- A manipulative aristocrat
- A marine

Diagram 10



The questionnaire's next section studied which character from the novel the participants identified with the most.

Diagram 11

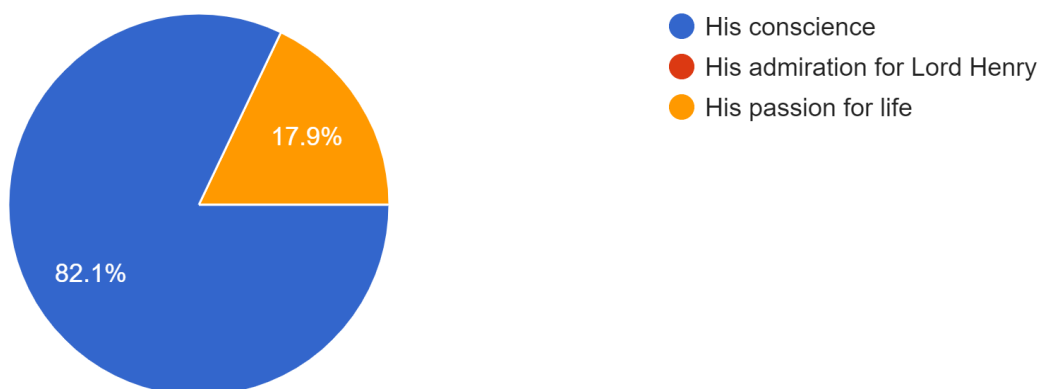


As it is seen in the diagram, most of the respondents related to Sibyl Vane's character. However, each character has been chosen by at least one student - even the ones considered to be negative.

In the next question, the participants had to recall what the portrait of Dorian Gray reflects in the novel with the help of three possible answers, which were the following:

- His conscience
- His admiration for Lord Henry
- His passion for life

Diagram 12



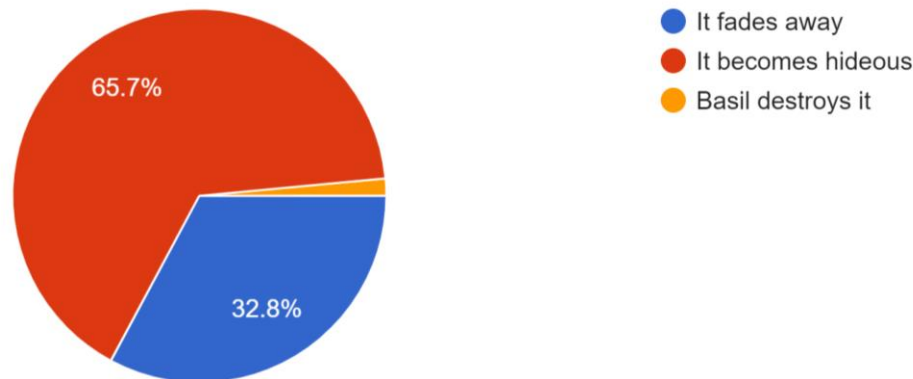
As the results show, 82.1% of the participants were able to answer correctly. The remainder 17.9% assumed that the portrait reflected Dorian Gray's passion for life.

The following question is related to the portrait as well. It examined whether the participants knew what happened to the portrait when Dorian Gray started living a life full of vile actions and crimes.

Here, the students were presented with three possible answers:

- It fades away
- It becomes hideous
- Basil destroys it

Diagram 13



According to the results, the answers were divisive: only 65.7% of the participants answered correctly; 32.8% said that the portrait fades away, while the remaining 1.5% chose the third option, stating that Basil destroys it.

The aim of the questionnaire was to draw a parallel between 19th-century and 21st-century society, including the mindset of real-life people and fictional characters.

Therefore, the following question deals with the priorities and values of people of different eras. It was stated that Oscar Wilde described a society that prioritised outer beauty and youth and asked the participants what role do these traits play in our society.

Furthermore, the participants were asked to consider the role of the Internet, the retouched photos and the manifestation of people's narcissism in the 21st century and explain how the story of Dorian Gray would be different if it took place nowadays. (E.g. would the characters use social media; would it affect their mental health, self-esteem, relationships etc.).

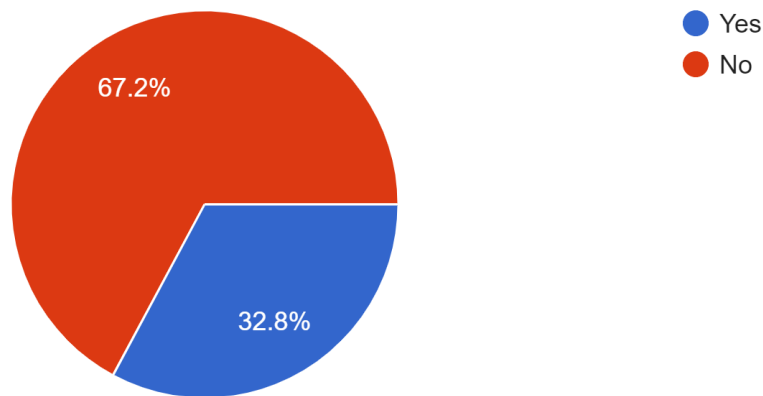
As the research was done among people who belonged to the same age group, their opinions and answers were similar.

The participants' answers were classified into two different groups: positive and negative opinions. The majority of them responded negatively, stating that social media and the use of photo editors have a big impact on the mindset of today's youth. It affects the way people see themselves and those around them. According to the answers, if the novel took place today, social media, especially Instagram, would play a huge role in the characters' lives. Therefore, the society Oscar Wilde described was similar to the one we live in nowadays.

Those who responded in a more positive way, on the other hand, justified their answers by stating that in the world of social media people are influenced by many around the world. This means that if Dorian Gray lived in the 21st century, Lord Henry wouldn't be able to have such a big effect on him. People are surrounded by different articles, theories, photos and videos every day; one person's opinion and ideology does not affect a 21st-century individual.

The survey's next question focused on whether the participants have seen any of the adaptations of "The Picture of Dorian Gray".

Diagram 14

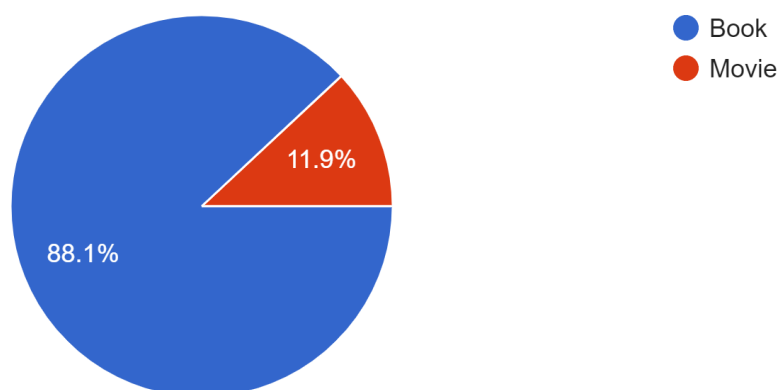


As the diagram shows, the majority of the participants have seen adaptations of Oscar Wilde's novel, while the remainder 32.8% have not.

According to those who have seen at least one adaptation, the most common were the following two movies: "Dorian Gray" (2009) and "The Picture of Dorian Gray" (1945).

The survey's next question examined whether the participants enjoyed the book or any adaptations of the novel.

Diagram 15



The diagram shows that 88.1% of the participants enjoyed the book more, while the remainder 11.9% preferred a movie adaptation to the novel.

The last question was an open-ended one. It focused on the participants' opinions on whether the story of Dorian Gray is relevant nowadays.

Among the most intriguing answers were that it is definitely relevant since people try to present themselves as perfect, but after a while this mask will fade away, revealing their true self; also, people judge each other by their money, social status, and success - the same way they did centuries ago.

3.5. Discussion and interpretation

As stated before, the research focused both on "The Picture of Dorian Gray" and the way it might affect today's society. The answers to the questionnaire show that the story of Dorian Gray is well-known among the young people who study in Transcarpathian schools. As the novel is taught in the 11th grade, the students' memory of it was still quite fresh which enabled them to answer the questions correctly and express their thoughts freely.

It is clear that the participants wanted to show their knowledge at the highest level; the open-ended questions required at least a superficial knowledge of what is going on in the world nowadays as well as the ideologies of 19th-century people. The students answered these questions in a subjective way which showed that they have a strong opinion about certain things, whether it is related to literature or recent day's ideas and notions.

However, some of the answers were incorrect, which is certainly common when it comes to filling out any kind of questionnaire. Those who made some mistakes in answering questions regarding Oscar Wilde's life or "The Picture of Dorian Gray" might have simply not been attentive enough during classes or when reading and answering the questions.

Moreover, some of the Transcarpathian school libraries lack books, so it is not easy to get access to some of the novels. This might be a big problem since world literature involves a lot of reading. Students of secondary schools receive a list of required readings each year. Therefore, the books that are on the list should be available in the school libraries as well.

On the other hand, the youth prefers reading PDF books and listening to audiobooks. The aim of ebooks and audiobooks is to simplify and increase the students' learning experience.

The benefit of modern educational means such as ebooks, audiobooks, or short book analyses in a video form is that they enable students to become more creative with the stories

they see or hear: they can draw and write all over them as well as create their own notes and ideas.

The answers reflect the students' knowledge of "The Picture of Dorian Gray". Since the novel deals with serious themes such as death, narcissism and bad habits, it is taught in the 11th grade. Therefore, the students can properly comprehend and analyse the story.

The results show how much reading can affect one's mental health. Reading can have a positive impact on people's mental well-being.

In fact, there is a kind of therapy called bibliotherapy that deals with people's mental issues by offering the books needed for their well-being. Self-help books have become so sought-after that bibliotherapists can prescribe them for their patients.

On the other hand, if someone does not enjoy self-help books, fiction can be beneficial as well. It improves one's imagination and can help to connect emotionally to fictional characters, reveal one's subconscious, including their thoughts, feelings, and the problems they are afraid to deal with.

Furthermore, the mindset of 19th-century and 21st-century people was compared. Many themes were not accepted in books back in the era Oscar Wilde lived in. The author dealt with the subject of homosexuality and suicide; the former was eliminated from the book during its editing, while the latter was merely mentioned and quickly overlooked by the readers.

However, both of these topics are relevant nowadays. Each generation is familiar with the concept of homosexuality. Moreover, it is being not only tolerated and accepted, but normalised as well. Suicidal thoughts and behaviour are being taken more seriously, too.

Young mental health advocates, such as Diana Chao, Tyler Smith and more talk about their traumas, experiences and healing journeys in order to help people all around the world. Back in the 19th century, people did not give as much thought to managing their anxiety and depression as they do nowadays. This is considered to be a huge step in becoming mentally healthier and happier.

As the survey focused on the novel's relevance in the 21st century, the participants had to explain whether they find its characters relatable, and the themes as well as the symbols significant. The participants' answers led to the conclusion that even though the story was published in 1890, its subject is more important to deal with than ever before. In the age of social media, vanity, fake confidence and false beauty have become part of our everyday life. Narcissism, outer beauty and youth were just as important in Oscar Wilde's novel as they are in our life now.

To summarise, the participants of the survey were familiar with Oscar Wilde's biography and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. According to the diagrams, tables and descriptions, most of the answers were correct. This actively illustrates that the material is taught properly in the schools that we did the research in.

There was not a big difference between the knowledge of the students of schools with the Hungarian language of instruction and the students of schools with the Ukrainian language of instruction.

The participants gave a full and detailed answer where it was required. The analysis of their thoughts and ideas in the open-ended questions and the assessment of their knowledge of 19th-century literature was possible due to their abilities to answer each question properly.

The survey aimed at consisting of questions not only based on facts, but requiring subjective opinions as well. Thus, those students who were not adept in Oscar Wilde's novels could still enjoy the survey and not fail. They were able to deal with the most common issues of the world by writing down their opinions and theories.

CONCLUSION

This thesis studied the themes of Victorian values, morality and sexuality in Oscar Wilde's novel "The Picture of Dorian Gray". It focused on the way the author's personal life, his aesthetic ideas and Victorian society influenced the novel.

The main argument in this work was that the Victorian period is characterised by the combination of science and spirituality. Victorian society focused on the importance of moral sense, sexual oppression and purity, which led to people living double lives. 19th-century England as well as its society was described and analysed in detail.

Different forms of art, ideologies and literary concepts, such as aestheticism, hedonism, the types and subtypes of genres, were explained in the thesis as well. It focused on the development of aesthetic values and principles.

The work analysed the main art movements of 19th-century England, including the Art for Art's Sake, the Aesthetic movement, the Decadent movement and Oscar Wilde's philosophy regarding beauty and art.

The Decadent movement was strongly associated with the Aesthetic movement. According to the followers of both movements, there were not right or wrong things and actions, only pleasant or unpleasant ones. British decadents focused on the idea of aesthetics. Their main aim was to satisfy their own desires and seek material things.

Oscar Wilde based the story of Dorian Gray on the society of Victorian England. Each character symbolises a type of person during this era, from aristocratic men to middle-class artists. The author's appreciation for aesthetics made people interested in both his personal life and works.

However, "The Picture of Dorian Gray" was labeled as immoral and unclean, probably because of its underlying homoerotic themes. Most of the moralist societies during the Victorian period were very limited. Thus, people were not allowed to act on their desires.

This thesis argued that it is rational to assume that Oscar Wilde used the novel as a criticism of the society he lived in had on its people. The entire novel has a pessimistic tone. This pessimism is present in the characters' homosexual desires and feelings towards each other, however, these must stay hidden from the public. It was appropriate to describe same-sex relationships in Gothic fiction, yet the criminalisation of homosexuality in the Victorian era forbade the explicit mention of it.

The novel can be interpreted as a symbolic portrayal of the two sides of Oscar Wilde's identity. Dorian Gray can be seen as the reflection of the author by which both aspects of his

personality appear on the surface. This implies that the actions of Dorian symbolise Wilde's desires and ideologies.

Although "The Picture of Dorian Gray" was not appreciated in the 1800s at all, after the death of Oscar Wilde, it began to attract a lot of people, including literary critics, scholars and film producers. It has eventually become the subject of different adaptations to both film and stage.

Returning to the hypothesis posed at the beginning of this thesis, it is now possible to state that Oscar Wilde was a high priest of the Aesthetic movement in 19th-century England. The main ideas and the style of "The Picture of Dorian Gray" are characterised by aestheticism, focusing on the importance of physical beauty and art. The writer's personal life was strongly influenced by aesthetic values as well.

The work also focused on Dorian Gray's character, particularly his monstrous qualities. The concept of Victorian morality was defined. Then, it was compared to the main character's moral values and principles.

Traditionally, a Gothic novel includes a villain. However, Wilde created a protagonist who was highly sensitive and naive, stepping on the wrong path. Dorian Gray's moral decay can be defined as both hereditary and acquired. Throughout the novel, the villain itself becomes the personification of art, something very close to the author's heart.

The answers to the questionnaire that was carried out among students show that Oscar Wilde's biography and "The Picture of Dorian Gray" are taught properly in Transcarpathian secondary schools. The number of participants that did not answer some of the questions correctly, might be explained by them simply not being attentive enough. Some of the questions were complicated and required not only the students' knowledge based on facts but subjective opinions and ideas as well.

"The Picture of Dorian Gray" is relevant even in this day and age: it contains great lessons for young people, shows the dark sides of selfishness and the consequences of one's actions. Even though some themes were eliminated from the book, mentions and hints were made at homoerotic desires, drug addiction and suicide. These topics are widely discussed nowadays.

In brief, the novel is a representation of Gothic fiction characterised by aestheticism. The Picture of Dorian Gray can be defined as a microcosm of 19th-century aestheticism.

The novel also warns against the fusion of art and real life. Even though the story was based on real-life social norms values, a lot of things have changed since then. It is important

to keep in mind that the principles of society must change over time in order to create a better world.

РЕЗЮМЕ

Метою даної роботи було розкрити жанрову і тематичну своєрідність роману Оскара Уайльда «Портрет Доріана Грея».

Відомий своєю гострою дотепністю та блискучим вмінням вести розмову з людьми, Оскар Уайльд став однією з найпопулярніших особистостей 19. століття. У роботі описано найважливіші аспекти життя Уайльда та його філософія і теорія естетизму.

Знаючи роль, яку роман «Портрет Доріана Грея» відіграв в англійській літературі, визначено роль літературного твору у суспільстві 21. століття.

У розділах роботи охарактеризовано готичну літературу, її особливості та життєвий і творчий шлях їх представників; з'ясовано сутність дефініцій які відносяться до ідейно-естетичних поглядів суспільства 19. століття, естетичної теорії Оскара Уайльда та її вплив на роман «Портрет Доріана Грея», та визначено найважливіші та найгірші властивості головного героя роману.

В третій частині роботи представлено результати дослідження, зосередженого на вивченні впливу роману Оскара Уайльда на сучасну молодь. Відповіді учасників дослідження, проведеного в загальноосвітніх школах Закарпаття, показали, що роман і екранізація книги «Портрет Доріана Грея» мають великий вплив на життя та навчання учнів середніх класів, які навчаються у Закарпатських школах.

Дослідження показало, що вчителі намагаються адекватно передати учням їхнє знання відносно до зарубіжної літератури. Більшість учасників відповіли правильно на різні питання про біографію Оскара Уайльда, його творчість та популярний роман «Портрет Доріана Грея».

Отже, висновок роботи - життя і естетична теорія Оскара Уайльда та його роман «Портрет Доріана Грея» мали великий вплив не тільки на літературу Вікторіанських віків, а також на життя різних поколінь.

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APPENDIX

Survey to assess the knowledge of pupils regarding Oscar Wilde's life and literary works.

Please answer the questions below:

1. What is your gender?
 - Female
 - Male
2. What do you enjoy doing in your free time: reading or watching movies/TV shows? Why?
3. What kind of books do you enjoy reading the most?
 - Adventure
 - Thriller/Gothic
 - Classic
 - History
 - Romance
 - Science fiction
 - Biography
 - Other
4. Does your mood usually affect the kind of books you read? (E.g. bad mood = books with a sad plot to match your mood or, on the contrary, easy reads to make you feel better).
5. Do you have a favourite literary character? Who is it and why?
6. Which part of literature do you find more interesting?
 - the life and work of different poets & writers
 - reading and analysing different literary works
7. Which century did Oscar Wilde live in?
 - 18th century
 - 19th century
 - 20th century
8. What ethnicity was Oscar Wilde?
 - Irish
 - American
 - French

9. What characterised Oscar Wilde's works?
- They contained moral lessons
 - Their main theme was love
 - He avoided supernatural elements and gothic features
10. Oscar Wilde was judged and laughed at by other people. It was forbidden to say his name out loud. What was the reason behind this?
- People did not like his works
 - People found out that he participated in consensual homosexual acts
 - He did not want to marry and start a family
11. Have you learned about Oscar Wilde's life and his best-known novel called “The Picture of Dorian Gray” in school?
- Yes
 - No
12. The Picture of Dorian Gray was published in 1890. However, the editors made a lot of changes to it. What did they eliminate from the book?
- Hints at homosexuality
 - Emphasis on the importance of outer beauty
 - The subject of suicide
13. The main themes of The Picture of Dorian Gray are (multiple answers are possible):
- Youth
 - Patriotism
 - Beauty
 - Family
 - Morality
 - Marriage
14. In your opinion, could the uncensored version of The Picture of Dorian Gray be published in the 21st century? Justify your answer.
15. The title hero is a complex character. List his main qualities.
16. Who is Basil Hallward?
- An artist
 - A manipulative aristocrat
 - A marine
17. Which “The Picture of Dorian Gray” character do you identify with the most? Why?
18. What does the portrait of Dorian Gray reflect?

- His conscience
 - His admiration for Lord Henry
 - His passion for life
19. Basil's painting manages to perfectly capture Dorian Gray's beauty. What happens to the portrait when Dorian starts living a life full of vile actions and crimes?
- It fades away
 - It becomes hideous
 - Basil destroys it
20. Considering the role of the Internet, the retouched photos and the manifestation of people's narcissism in the 21st century, explain how the story of Dorian Gray would be different if it took place nowadays.
21. Many adaptations of the novel exist. Have you seen any of them? If the answer is “yes”, which movie adaptation have you seen? (Full title, the year it came out).
22. Which version of “The Picture of Dorian Gray” do you prefer more?
- Book
 - Movie

NYILATKOZAT

Alulírott, Kasztner Antónia angol szakos hallgató, kijelentem, hogy a dolgozatomat a II. Rákóczi Ferenc Kárpátaljai Magyar Főiskolán, a Filológia tanszéken készítettem, angol nyelv és irodalom tanári diploma megszerzése végett.

Kijelentem, hogy a dolgozatot más szakon korábban nem védtem meg, saját munkám eredménye, és csak a hivatkozott forrásokat (szakirodalom, eszközök stb.) használtam fel.

Tudomásul veszem, hogy dolgozatomat a II. Rákóczi Ferenc Kárpátaljai Magyar Főiskola könyvtárának Kézirattárában helyezik el.

Beregszász, 2022. június 1.

Kasztner Antónia