017

Dorian Gray kills Dorian Gray

WARM UP

1. Answer the following questions.

1 Does your inner self correspond to your outer self?
2 Are you what people see of you?
3 What relationship is there between your inner self and your outer self?
4 Choose one of the questions above and express your opinion about it. Think also of a character (real or fictional) that can embody your opinion about the issue.

The passage you are going to read is taken from the last chapter of the book and contains its unexpected and shocking conclusion.

He took the lamp from the table and crept upstairs. As he unbarred[1] the door, a smile of joy flitted across his strangely young-looking face and lingered[2] for a moment about his lips. Yes, he would be good, and the hideous[3] thing that he had hidden away would no longer be a terror to him. He felt as if the load had been lifted from him already.

He went in quietly, locking the door behind him, as was his custom, and dragged[4] the purple hanging from the portrait. A cry of pain and indignation broke from him. He could see no change, save that in the eyes there was a look of cunning[5] and in the mouth the curved wrinkle[6] of the hypocrite. The thing was still loathsome[7] — more loathsome, if possible, than before — and the scarlet dew[8] that spotted the hand seemed brighter, and more like blood newly spilled. Then he trembled. Had it been merely vanity that had made him do his one good deed? Or the desire for a new sensation, as Lord Henry had hinted, with his mocking laugh? Or that passion to act a part that sometimes makes us do things finer than we are ourselves? Or, perhaps, all these? And why was the red stain larger than it had been? It seemed to have crept[9] like a horrible disease over the wrinkled fingers. There was blood on the painted feet, as though the thing had dripped — blood even on the hand that had not held the knife. Confess? Did it mean that he was to confess? To give himself up[10] and be put to death? He laughed. He felt that the idea was monstrous. Besides, even if he did confess, who would believe him? There was no trace of the murdered man anywhere. Everything belonging to him had been destroyed. He himself had burned what had been below-stairs. The world would simply say that he was mad. They would shut him up if he persisted in his story... . Yet it was his duty to confess, to suffer public shame, and to make public atonement[11]. There was a God who called upon men to tell their sins to earth as well as to heaven. Nothing that he could do would cleanse him till he had told his own sin. His sin? He shrugged his shoulders. The death of Basil Hallward seemed very little to him. He was thinking of Hetty Merton. For it was an unjust mirror, this mirror of his soul that he was looking at. Vanity? Curiosity? Hypocrisy? Had there been nothing more in his renunciation than that? There had been something more. At least he thought so. But who could tell?... No. There had been nothing more. Through vanity he had spared her. In hypocrisy he had worn the mask of goodness. For curiosity's sake he had tried the denial of self. He recognized that now.

But this murder — was it to dog[12] him all his life? Was he always to be burdened by his past? Was he really to confess? Never. There was only one bit of evidence left against him. The picture itself — that was evidence. He would destroy it. Why had he kept it so long? Once it had given him pleasure to watch it changing and growing old. Of late he had felt no such pleasure. It had kept him awake at night. When he had been away, he had been filled with

1 **unbarred:** aprì
2 **lingered:** rimase
3 **hideous:** terribile
4 **dragged:** tirò via
5 **cunning:** astuzia
6 **wrinkle:** smorfia
7 **loathsome:** terribile
8 **dew:** rugiada
9 **crept:** estesa
10 **to give himself up:** costituirsi alla polizia
11 **atonement:** ammenda, espiazione
12 **to dog:** perseguitare

terror lest[13] other eyes should look upon it. It had brought melancholy across his passions. Its mere memory had marred[14] many moments of joy. It had been like conscience to him. Yes, it had been conscience. He would destroy it.

He looked round and saw the knife that had stabbed Basil Hallward. He had cleaned it many times, till there was no stain left upon it. It was bright, and glistened[15]. As it had killed the painter, so it would kill the painter's work, and all that that meant. It would kill the past, and when that was dead, he would be free. It would kill this monstrous soul-life, and without its hideous warnings, he would be at peace. He seized the thing, and stabbed the picture with it.

There was a cry heard, and a crash. The cry was so horrible in its agony that the frightened servants woke and crept out of their rooms. Two gentlemen, who were passing in the square below, stopped and looked up at the great house. They walked on till they met a policeman and brought him back. The man rang the bell several times, but there was no answer. Except for a light in one of the top windows, the house was all dark. After a time, he went away and stood in an adjoining portico and watched.

'Whose house is that, Constable?' asked the elder of the two gentlemen.

'Mr Dorian Gray's, sir,' answered the policeman.

They looked at each other, as they walked away, and sneered[16]. One of them was Sir Henry Ashton's uncle.

Inside, in the servants' part of the house, the half-clad[17] domestics were talking in low whispers to each other. Old Mrs Leaf was crying and wringing her hands. Francis was as pale as death.

After about a quarter of an hour, he got the coachman and one of the footmen and crept upstairs. They knocked, but there was no reply. They called out. Everything was still. Finally, after vainly trying to force the door, they got on the roof and dropped down on to the balcony. The windows yielded easily — their bolts were old.

When they entered, they found hanging upon the wall a splendid portrait of their master as they had last seen him, in all the wonder of his exquisite youth and beauty. Lying on the floor was a dead man, in evening dress, with a knife in his heart. He was withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage. It was not till they had examined the rings that they recognized who it was.

13 lest: per timore che (arcaico)
14 marred: rovinato
15 glistened: luccicava
16 sneered: fecero una smorfia di scherno
17 half-clad: mezzi vestiti

▼ A frame from Oliver Parker's film *Dorian Gray* (2009), starring Ben Barnes.

COMPREHENSION

2. Read the text and answer the following questions.

1 Who is the protagonist of the passage?
2 What does he see?
3 What does it look like?
4 What does he decide to do?
5 How does the story end?

ANALYSIS

3. Focus on the narrator.

1 What is the narrative technique used by Wilde in this passage?
2 Define the kind of narrator used in this passage. Choose among the following:
   a unobtrusive
   b obtrusive
   c omniscient
   d non-omniscient

4. Focus on the first sequence.

1 Why does the narrator describe Dorian's face as 'strangely young-looking'? What is strange about it?
2 Why does the narrator call the painting 'the hideous thing'?

5. Focus on the second sequence where Dorian muses about confessing his sins or not.

1 What causes Dorian's 'cry of pain and indignation'?
2 Underline the occurrences of the word 'blood' in this sequence. What effect does the repetition of this word produce? Choose among the following:
   a It underlines Dorian's sense of guilt.
   b It metonymically transforms Dorian's guilt into something visible.
   c It shows that the painting is guilty, too.
   d Other (specify).
3 Why is this sequence filled with direct questions? What is their function? Choose the correct option.
   a They summarise the content of the passage.
   b They represent Dorian's questions to himself.
   c They suggest that Dorian is confused and his mind is constantly oscillating from one position to another.
4 The narrator describes Dorian's painting as 'an unjust mirror, this mirror of his soul that he was looking at'. Why is the painting compared to the mirror of Dorian's soul?

6. In the third sequence Dorian makes his decision. Why does he think it would free him from damnation?

7. The fourth section brings us outside Dorian's house and forces us to see things from a distant perspective. What is the aim of this device? Choose the correct option.

a It gives us an insight into the everyday life of a Victorian city.
b It makes us feel frightened like Dorian's servants.
c It heightens the sense of mystery and suspense.
d Other (specify).

8. Focus on the last sequence. Who has killed whom?

INTERPRETATION

9. Do you think Dorian led an unconventional life of art and beauty? Why/Why not? Choose the correct option.

a Dorian appreciated art and beauty all his life.
b Dorian led a life of horror and crime, never really appreciating beauty – except his own.

10. Do you think Dorian's life was an example of freedom from bourgeois morality? Why/Why not? Choose the correct option.

a No, Dorian simply committed a series of hideous crimes and hid them from the rest of the world, as hypocrites do.
b Yes, Dorian's life was an example of nonconformity, which made an outcast of him.