



**UNIVERSIDADE ESTADUAL DA PARAÍBA
CENTRO DE EDUCAÇÃO II
DEPARTAMENTO DE LETRAS E ARTES**

FRANCINALDO FREIRE DA SILVA

**A QUEER THEORY IMPLEMENTED READING OF OSCAR WILDE'S *THE
PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY***

**CAMPINA GRANDE – PB
NOVEMBER – 2014**



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Monograph in the end of an English Modern
Languages Course at Universidade Estadual da
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Irineu Barros.

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S586q Silva, Francinaldo Freire da
A queer theory implemented reading of Oscar Wilde's the
picture of Dorian Gray [manuscrito] / Francinaldo Freire da Silva.
- 2014.
26 p.

Digitado.
Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso (Graduação em Letras) -
Universidade Estadual da Paraíba, Centro de Educação, 2014.
"Orientação: Prof. Me. Valécio Irineu Barros, Departamento
de Letras".

1. Análise Literária 2. Identidade de Gênero 3.
Performatividade 4. Transgressão da Norma I. Título.
21. ed. CDD 801.95

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am deeply grateful to all of my teachers since the elementary school until now.

Their dedication and work has enabled me to reach my present level of education, and for that I feel obliged to thank them very much.

“To my parents, who never lost the opportunity to help me achieving my academic goals”.

“There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book.

Books are well written, or badly written. That is all”.

Oscar Wilde, 1891.

ABSTRACT

Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was a book centuries ahead of its time. It invites the reader to take a look at the universe of queer men, which was very bold on the part of Oscar Wilde considering the time when it was published, The Victorian Age. The objective of this work is read the book from the perspective of Queer Theory. This task requires a brief account of the evolution of the studies around gender identities, before we can establish what Queer Theory comes to be and how we can submit a given literary work to analytic readings based on that theory. Therefore we intend to refer to the work of Michel Foucault (1976), Judith Butler (1988), Gayle Rubin (1975), and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990). Finally, we are going to focus our analytic attention on the questions of performativity in the gender constitution of Basil Hallward, one of the characters of Wilde's novel, and the consequences of the transgressions of the social norm which establishes the patterns of binary man and woman opposite genders when queer men decide to live their desire in patriarchal society.

Key Words: queer theory, gender identities, performativity, transgression of the norm.

RESUMO

O Retrato de Dorian Gray de Wilde é uma obra que está séculos a frente de seu tempo. Ele convida o leitor para dar uma espiada no universo dos homens gays, o que foi bastante ousado da parte de Oscar Wilde se considerarmos a época em que ele foi escrito, a Era Vitoriana. O objetivo deste trabalho é fazer uma leitura do livro levando em consideração a perspectiva da *QueerTheory*. Isto exige um relato breve da evolução do estudo das questões de gênero, antes que possamos estabelecer o que vem a ser a *QueerTheory* e como poderíamos submeter uma determinada obra literária a uma leitura analítica baseada em tal teoria. Portanto, nós faremos referências aos trabalhos de Michel Foucault (1976), Judith Butler (1988), Gayle Rubin (1975), e Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990). Finalmente, vamos direcionar o foco de nossa análise nas questões da performatividade na construção do gênero de uma das personagens do romance de Wilde (Basil Hallward), e nas consequências da transgressão da norma que estabelece gêneros binários “homem” / “mulher” quando uma personagem gay decide viver o seu desejo dentro da sociedade patriarcal.

Palavras Chave: queertheory, identidades de gênero, performatividade, transgressão da norma.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* offers the readers an opportunity to cast a glance at a universe very seldom mentioned at the time of its writing — the queer universe. It was the only novel written by Wilde, and it was first published in 1891, during the Victorian Age. It took almost a century until an appropriate line of studies emerged in literary theory, so as to enable new readings of Wilde's text in a way that addressed the questions of gender identities, performativity and transgression of an established norm for sexual behavior as they might have been alluded to by Wilde on the pages of his novel. We believe that the line of studies known as *Queer Theory* can be the necessary approach for that task. Even in the present, at the first half of Twenty first century, those issues present in Wilde's novel are controversial and the progress towards understanding and acceptance of different gender expressions and behaviors has not been enough to ensure “queer” people a decent standard of acceptance in some sections of our society. Consequently, a reading of Wilde's novel, implementing a good theory of gender formation and gender identities, in English Literature, would serve the purpose of promoting discussions that can help people widen their point of view, and gather information about sexuality that might contribute, somehow, to reduce the prejudice against “queer” people.

This work has a far less ambitious purpose. We want to present a brief account of the development of gender studies in English Literature beginning with feminism in the late 1960s and going over the period between the late 60s until the 1990s when Queer Theory began to take shape. In so doing, we intend to present a framework on the basis of which *The Picture of Dorian Gray* may be read and discussed according to the guidelines of scholars of Queer Theory. The next step will be the analysis of Basil Hallward's behavior, as depicted by Wilde. We intend to show the implications of Basil's behavior in the Victorian society where the events narrated in the novel take place, eliciting examples of gender formation, as a result of a social construction and performativity, as well as the consequences suffered by that character on account of his transgression of the norms for gender roles established by this society. We decided to restrict our analysis to Basil Hallward and to leave out considerations about the author's biographic influence on the book, in order to be able to consider one object of analysis at a time, as it is suitable for a monograph.

As we continue to examine the evolution of feminism and gender studies towards queer theory, we shall gradually offer some definitions for the concepts aforementioned. However, we have to admit our limited knowledge about those subjects in face of the state of the art of the theory itself. These are very recent studies in literary criticism and the very concepts we alluded to are still prone to modifications, as updated information begin to be given by the authors who have been elaborating Queer Theory over the last twenty years. Nevertheless, a number of articles have been written by competent authors on those matters, such as Rivkin & Ryan (2004), and the series of authors used by them, more precisely Gayle Rubin's *The Traffic in women* (1975), for considerations on the evolution of sex roles under patriarchy and its connections with the socio-economic system; Judith Butler's *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution* (1988), especially her argument for performativity, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's text on the consequences of the transgression of the norm, as exposed in *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990). We have to clarify that Butler, based her argument on Simone de Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty's claims about the role of the body as a historical idea; while Sedgwick, refers to Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality-an introduction* (1976) to comment about society's reaction to queer people's transgressions of the norm of binary gender.

The last part of our work aims at the analysis of Basil Hallward's character in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Grey* by applying the concepts from Queer Theory and the other gender studies previously mentioned. The focus being on the consequences he had to face as a result of his "outrageous" behavior.

2. A BRIEF ACCOUNT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF GENDER STUDIES IN LITERARY THEORY

The present work is the result of a bibliographic research on Rivkin & Ryan's *Literary Theory- an anthology* (2004), as well as on Foucault's *History of Sexuality- an introduction*¹. The former offers us an account of the evolution of gender studies, beginning

¹ The referred research was done in: Michel Foucault, *História da sexualidade, volume I: vontade de saber*, translated by Maria Thereza da Costa Albuquerque and J. A. Guilhon, Rio de Janeiro: Edições Graal, 1988, pp. 50-51.

with feminism, moving forward to gender studies and arriving at Queer Theory. The latter is considered the very basis of Queer Theory, due to its detailed analysis of the emergence of “homosexuality” as something “pathologic” during the late 19th century.

2.1- Feminism as the starting point for gender studies and Queer Theory

Several articles organized and published in *Literary Theory, an Anthology* by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (2004) establish the beginning of feminism in literary criticism around the years 60s and 70s of the 20th century, even though registers of texts discussing women’s right can be found from Virginia Woolf’s time, the during the first decades of 20th century (Rivkin & Ryan, 2004, p.765). Nevertheless, it seems that all the sources researched agree that a stronger emphasis on the issue of women’s rights emerged intensively and very perceptibly during the twenty years between the 1960 and 1980. Those were years when women in the western industrialized countries represented a great part of the productive population, and they had conquered many rights such as the right to vote and choose representatives and government heads, and to occupy positions once occupied exclusively by men. However, the situation of women writers was still not very comfortable in the 60’s, because they had been reduced to silence under the traditional male rule in society (Rivkin & Ryan, 2004, p.766). For example, the literary canon taught at school was overwhelmingly male, so the female students were submitted to male points of view (often misogynist), which were conveyed as “universal”. The fact is that women writers had been excluded from the canon and found refuge in the writing of diaries, letters and in sentimental fiction. Those genres were disqualified by literary scholars (mostly male) in considerations for inclusion in the canon (Rivkin & Ryan, 2004 p.766). That situation led critics to engage into efforts to criticize misogynist stereotypes in male literature, and to recover the lost tradition and the long labor of historical reconstruction of female writing in English Literature.

The idea of gender as something constructed by culture in peoples’ psyche, through language, began to appear in the 40’s when French feminists started analyzing the woman as a character. This idea became central to both gender studies and Queer Theory. By that time, there were two different perspectives in literary criticism discussions on gender: the *essentialist trend*, which tends to advocate the idea that gender reflects a natural difference

between men and women that is psychological, even linguistic, as it is biological, inspired by French Post-Structuralism and supported by feminist psychoanalyst Nancy Chodorow, ethical philosopher Carol Gilligan and feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray. All these critics, in their particular way, agree that women are more connected to matter or to the physical world than men, because of their physical differences alone (birthing, lactation, menstruation); thus they hold that women are more caring than men because of their psychological and physical traits (Cf. Rivkin & Ryan, 2004, p. 767). The *constructivist trend* considers different factors as important to the formation of gender identities, as they refer to Marxist theory of the social construction of individual subjectivity, as well as to the Post-Structuralist idea that language writes rather than reflects gender identities. In that case, gender would be “no less than a construction of patriarchal culture than the idea that man are somehow superior to women”, those authors claim that both ideas were born “at the same time and at the same stroke of the pen”. (Cf. Rivkin & Ryan, 2004, p.768).

Thus, to constructionist critics all genders, either male or female are fabricated. Such fabrication is carried out by performativity, masquerade and imitation as cultural processes which create gender identities that only appear to possess a pre-existing natural or material substance. Following these guidelines, Rivkin & Ryan (2004, p.900) present the essay *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution* by Judith Butler (1988) who began to argue in the mid-80s that all gender is performative, i.e. , an imitation of a code that refers to an allegedly “natural substance”.

As to how women came to be a domesticated object in certain capitalist relations, Rivkin & Ryan (2004, p.770), present the Marxist-based view of Gayle Rubin in the essay *The Traffic in women* (1975), in which she claims the existence of a system of relationships whereby women become the prey of men. She alludes to the overlapping works of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Sigmund Freud as the sources from which one begins to perceive the presence of a systematic social apparatus, which takes up females as raw materials and fashions them into domesticated women as products. At the same time, Rubin admits that these ideas are not explicit in the mentioned theorists’ works, and that she made a kind of “exegetical” reading of those authors aided by Jacques Lacan’s point of view, (Rivkin & Ryan, 2004, p.771). Out of those readings, she said it was possible to define the part of social life responsible for women and other sexual minorities, and this part she defined as “sex/gender system”, a set of arrangements whereby a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which some social needs are satisfied.

2.2- Gender Studies in the 70's and 80's- the cradle of Queer Theory

The years 1968-69 witnessed an outbreak of many new patterns of behavior which, evolved into new conducts and practices in western society. We might think of Paris Spring as an example, but it is more pertinent to the topic we have been discussing to write about New York City's 1969 Wall Stoner riots, for they are referred to by Rivkin & Ryan as "a fissure in the crystalline edifice of social order, which in time widened and broke the system in an act of rebellion against the status quo" (2004. p.885). In that night, a group of gay men reacted to repressive acts on the part of some New York Police Department officers, many of them being consequently arrested. The incident became emblematic to the gay community in the U.S.A and later on, worldwide, as movements to defend gay rights, such as "Gay Pride" took shape. Those are registered facts in History. However, it is what had been happening in the minds of feminists that interests us most: anthropologists and historians at the time had begun to defend that gender is variable in history and between societies, that is, there is a variation between different ways of practicing sex and being one gender or another. Thus, the focus of studies migrated from issues concerning the oppression of women by men to aspects of gender and its origins.

The studies about the now stigmatized sexual practices (anal intercourse, fellatio and cunnilingus and intercourse between women) show that they used to be coded differently in different cultures, across different societies and throughout history. Rivkin & Ryan (2004, p.886) mention the work of scholars Gayle Rubin, Alan Bray and Michel Foucault who identify the 19th century as the moment in time when such practices were "discovered" to be signs of identifiable perversion, even though they used to be considered common by previously existing societies.

We can mention the sexual behavior in many groups from New Guinea, in which the time a baby boy spends in uterus, is considered as a negation of his maleness, so in order to overcome the malevolent effects of his fetal history, the boy has to obtain and consume semen and he does so by a homosexual partnership with male kinsmen. Moreover, in kinship systems dower used to determine the statuses of husband and wife, other prerequisites were

overridden. Thus, among the Azande² older men used to monopolize women, so that a young man could take a boy as a wife until he came of age. He would pay the dowry for the boy (in spears), who would then, be turned into his wife. A Dahomey³ woman could turn herself into a husband if she had the necessary bridewealth (Rivkin & Ryan, 2004, p. 783). Consequently, we may infer from the above that in those cultures the sexual activity did not fall into any criminal or medical labels. Gender was then, contingent to social and economic factors.

What made our society so neurotic about sexual issues? Christianity is pointed at as the factor that stands between the two different views over time, for it played a role in stigmatizing non-reproductive sexual practices. According to Rivkin & Ryan, (2004, p. 886), “gay and lesbian scholars in the 1970s and 1980s started to peel away the layers of prejudice” that cover the history of queer writings. In this context, Guy Hocquengham and Jeffrey Weeks analyzed the psychology of homophobia and the history of “coming out” respectively. The translation of the first volume of Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* also dates back to this period, and it represented a thrust in the gender studies, for it conveyed Foucault’s argument that “homosexuality” is a social, medical and ontological category invented in the late nineteenth century and imposed on practices that the society of the time considered immoral. Modern heterogenic culture used this “scientific” scrutiny on such practices as one more argument to anathemize non-reproductive sexual alternatives that are, in fact, present everywhere in human society. The conclusion of several lines of research into gender studies and gay and lesbian studies is that sexuality and gender are variable and indeterminate; they do not align with simple male-female polarities and can take on multiple, highly differentiated forms.

At the end of the 80’s, Foucault’s books had a wide circulation and many scholars from different fields were reading and writing argument around the idea of gender as something independent from biology, and contingent on social and cultural conditions. It was the moment to elaborate on the way in which those gender roles are constructed, and about the effects of those different gender identities on society. Queer Theory was in its cradle, and the articles and essays published from 1988 on were the first steps of an audacious new born theory for literary analysis.

² Azandes were tribes spread over three Central Africa's Triangle countries, namely [South Sudan](#), [the Democratic Republic of the Congo](#) and the [Central African Republic](#)

³ Dahomey was an African kingdom (in the present-day country of Benin) which lasted from about 1600 until 1900.

2.3 Queer Theory as a way to reread same sex affection and behavior

We have had the clear impression that Foucault (1976, p.50)⁴ applies a reasoning as to the transformation of sexuality into “homosexuality”, not as just due to economic contingencies, but also due to social, legal and religious repressive apparatus of control:

This new persecution of the peripheral sexualities entailed an incorporation of *perversions* and a new *specification of individuals*. As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away. It was consubstantial with him, less as a habitual sin than as a singular nature. We must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized—Westphal's famous article of 1870 on "contrary sexual sensations" can stand as its date of birth—less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself. Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.⁵

This incisive argument sounded like a thunderstorm to more conservative ears, but it was music to many gay and lesbian scholars who had been writing about different gender identities in literature. Consequently, Queer Theory began to conquer more followers. We may as well take Judith Butler as an example. She wrote the essay *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution* (1988), which was commented on by Rivkin & Ryan (2004, pp. 900-910), in which she claims that all gender is a type of fabrication in society. She goes further on her argumentation by saying that all gender identity is performed or enacted. Butler quotes Simone de Beauvoir's words “one is not born, but rather, *becomes* a woman”, a reinterpretation of the doctrine of constituting acts. This argumentation states that gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time — an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*. Butler's aim, in this essay, is to show that gender identity is a performance

⁴ For a reading in Portuguese: Michel Foucault, *História da sexualidade*, volume I: a vontade de saber, tradução de Maria Thereza da Costa Albuquerque e J. A. Guilhon, Rio de Janeiro: Edições Graal, 1988, pp. 50-51.

⁵ From Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Volume I: An Introduction, Trans. Robert Hurley, New York: Random House, 1980, pp. 42-44

accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo. The idea that gender is constructed through history by social factors and not determined by biology is still being debated among Feminists. Additionally, the issue around the body has become central in that debate. Butler (1988) quotes from Simone de Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty's argumentation about the role of the body as a historical idea. Especially Merleau-Ponty who claims that the body gains its meaning through a concrete and historically mediated expression in the world. By the same token, this means that the appearance of the body, (as a set of possibilities), is not predetermined by some interior essence, but rather, its concrete expression in the world results from the taking on of a set of historical possibilities. In other words, the body is always an embodying of possibilities both conditioned and circumscribed by historical convention. It is a historical situation, as claimed by Beauvoir, it is a manner of doing, dramatizing and reproducing a historical situation. The implication of these ideas about the body is that gender is considered as a corporeal style, an "act", something both intentional and performative, where performance would mean "dramatic" and "non-referential". Besides, it is apparent from Beauvoir's argument that being a woman is a historical construct; the idea of gender roles, a strategy of survival, a performance with clearly punitive consequences. Those who fail to play their gender roles right are regularly punished.

Likewise, we can apply the same line of reasoning to gay lifestyle as performative responses of some people to social pressures. Of course, we are not referring to desire or other feelings that may draw two men or two women to one another, but in terms of attitudes and the use of the body. Gays and lesbians particularly seem to have a great inclination to design specific characters to act in different social spaces, so as to gain acceptance or simply to manage to survive in a homophobic society which, is not inclined at all to accept a sexual behavior that goes entirely against the long time established norm of binary couples, man and woman and sexual intercourse designed for procreation.

Foucault (1976) presents an interesting, if not pertinent, reason for that restriction of sexual acts to the couple's bedroom and to the removal of all other sexual expressions and behaviors, which go against such pre-established norm to peripheral areas of society: sex was a prohibited topic for conversation, children were under constant surveillance everywhere, sexual practices that did not aim at reproduction were tolerated only far from the houses

where polite society families lived. Additionally, he explains that modern repression of sex coincides with the development of capitalism as means of production (1976, p.12)⁶:

“Sex is repressed so strictly because it is incompatible with job placement, general and intense; at a time when work force was systematically exploited, could it be tolerated that it was dissipated in pleasures, unless, those pleasures, reduced to the minimum, which would allow people to reproduce themselves?”

That rhetorical question gives us a lot to think about. It may lead us into understanding the reason for people with different gender identity, gays for example, feeling compelled to apply performative mechanisms to live in society, while they carry out their intimacy, often hidden from the other people. Additionally, it becomes clear that the “faggot” or the “dike” is another gender identity constructed by those individuals to live their sexuality in a more open way, regardless of the high price they may pay for it in certain ultraconservative and homophobic spheres of modern society. Such a price may be their freedom and, in some extreme, though unfortunately not infrequent cases, their lives.

Those gay people who prefer to hide their behavior are considered to be “in the closet”. The closet is a set of strategies designed to disguise their feelings, their emotions, and their probable involvement with other people of the same sex. Why are these things necessary? Rivkin & Ryan (2004 p.912-920) draw our attention to Eve Sedgwick’s essay entitled *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) in which she criticizes the tendency in Postmodern society of treating people who carry out such practices as a different species under scientific examination. She alludes to Foucault, (1976) who first presented a similar argument in his *History of Sexuality*, “the homosexual was now a species”, these are his exact words. Along the 20th century, such tendency has grown even more intense and has led to condensation of human sexual behavior into sexual categories; *Epistemology of the Closet* explores the implications and consequences of these condensations. It points out the dependence between the terms “heterosexual” and “homosexual” and suggests that there is a subliminal homophobic pressure to devaluate one (homosexual) while privileging the other (heterosexual) underlying the creation of such terms . Therefore, to live in a society that is

⁶ Translated on a free basis from the Portuguese edition: “... se o sexo é reprimido com tanto rigor, é por ser incompatível com uma colocação no trabalho, geral e intensa, na época em que se explora sistematicamente a força de trabalho, poder-se-ia tolerar que ela fosse dissipada nos prazeres, salvo naqueles, reduzidos ao mínimo, que lhe permitem reproduzir-se?”

regulated to such intolerant norms, some gay men and women devised a performative out-of-the-doors behavior, to fit the so called “heterosexual” expectation or code, in an attempt to escape from prejudice, homophobia and in many cases, in many places around the globe, to escape from being murdered.

In the closet lie their real feelings and emotions. Outside the closet it is too dangerous. So, another gender identity emerges masked behind artificial behavior, all the time in self-denial of one’s real feelings.

Sedgwick (1990) also offers the reader two readings for the terms sex and gender. She defines “sex” as biological differences of the species *Homo sapiens* who have XX and those who have XY chromosomes, which includes differences in genital formation, hair growth, fat distribution, hormonal functions and reproductive capacity. That would be “chromosomal sex”. As for “gender”, she states that it is a far more elaborated; more fully and rigidly dichotomized social production of male and female identities and behaviors – of male and female persons. The marked difference between chromosomal sex and gender lies on the fact that the former is immanent in the individual and biologically based, while the latter is seen as culturally mutable and variable, highly relational (each of the binarized genders is defined primarily by its relation to the other), and inextricable from a history of power differences between genders.

In short, Sedgwick(1990) contends that those binary categories of gender have contributed little to the clear understanding of human sexuality as a whole, because the terms sex and gender overlap; these terms are often interchanged many times to conform with prejudiced views of gender. A given gender does not seem to contain all the possibilities of sexual activities observed in the Western society; and the strong tendency to limit acceptable sexual activities to binary distinctions of gender has only led to prejudice. We would add to that homophobia and murder.

We believe the sources and argument presented so far are enough to enable us to analyse Basil Hallward, a character from Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and in the pages that follow we intend to do it based on the theoretic foundations we have just exposed. Our analysis aims at addressing the constitution of Hallward’s gender identity, the possible transgression of the binary gender norms by him, and the consequences of such a transgression in the course of Wilde’s narrative. Additionally, we intend to give our particular

perception of the settings where Wilde placed the action in, as well as our own conclusions of this reading implemented utilizing Queer theory.

3- BASIL HALLWARD UNDER QUEER THEORY'S LENSES

Basil Hallward is our object for analysis in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890-91). He is the artist who appears in the novel's first chapter at the moment when he has a very interesting dialogue with Lord Henry Wotton over a picture he has been finishing. The dialogue might seem unusual from the start, for both men end up discussing the beauty of the model in the picture, a young man called Dorian Gray. The contents of the conversation certainly caused outrage to many readers at the time the book was printed, and even today, almost two centuries later it, is not very easy to digest for some conservative readers. We are referring to the Victorian age, when sex was something completely restricted to the Christian couple's bedroom, and the norm prescribed sexual activities mainly for reproductive purposes (Foucault, 1976, pp. 45, 46). Furthermore, the men are referring to the model in romantic terms, an almost explicit allusion to man to man love, (TPODGp.9)⁷:

"Too much of yourself in it [the picture]! Upon my word, Basil, I didn't know you were so vain; and I really can't see any resemblance between you, with your rugged strong face and your coal-black hair, and this young Adonis, who looks as if he was made out of ivory and rose-leaves. Why, my dear Basil, he is a Narcissus, and you-well, of course you have an intellectual expression, and all that. But beauty, real beauty ends where an intellectual expression begins. (...) Look at the successful men in any of the learned professions. How perfectly hideous they are! Except, of course, in the Church. But then in the Church they don't think. (...) Your mysterious young friend, whose name you have never told me, but whose picture really fascinates me, never thinks. (...) He is some brainless, beautiful creature, who should be always here in winter when we have no flowers to look, and always here in summer when we want something to chill our intelligence".

Consider the references to Greek mythology. Adonis is a symbol of male beauty, and Narcissus was a boy whose beauty led to his fatal death. But what really caught our attention was the comparison between Dorian Gray and flowers. Today's edition of Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary has this definition for 'pansy': "2. (*informal derog*) a man whose

⁷*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, that is the way we are going to refer to the novel henceforward.

behavior or manners are like a woman's; a male HOMOSEXUAL" (emphasis by A.S. Hornby, the dictionary's author); that is a very interesting coincidence. But the point we are trying to make is that these two characters apparently do not conform to the binary gender norm of sexual behavior of that time, so they might as well be labeled "queer" or gay, in our conception, as we try to escape the term homosexual for its implications as descriptive of mentally sick people; and also considering that "Queer Theory adopted term 'queer', being a derogatory name for a gay or lesbian person", and "turned it against the perpetrator of prejudice by transforming it into a token of pride". (Rivkin & Ryan, 2004 pp. 887,896).

When questioned about his reasons for not wanting his art work to be exhibited, Basil gives even more interesting hints about his complex gender identity, or, in other words, about the performative behavior he developed in order to live his life in such a hypocritical society, and escape reproach. He makes it perfectly clear that a great part of his life was lived in hiding; secrecy was for him something indispensable. What had he got to hide? "When I like people immensely, I never tell their names to anyone. It is like surrendering a part of them. I have grown to love secrecy", he said, Or was he deadly afraid of what others might say or think and do if they got to know that his love might find material realization under the form of sexual acts condemned by the moral canon at the time? Let us remember Foucault's claims about "an incorporation of perversions and a new specification of individuals" which had made the homosexual now a species (1976, p.50).

For Sedgwick (1990) as commented by Rivkin and Ryan (2004, p.193) homosexual behavior would fall immediately under "homophobic pressure to devalue" the individual in relation to heterosexual people. Consequently, Basil did have a lot to hide away from others when he "liked a person immensely". He used to live a secret life inside the closet, as queer people of the present time might say. During this dialogue in the same chapter, he says it is impossible for him to let anybody else see the picture because "he had put too much of himself into it", he also adds that he had "shown in it the secret of his own soul". Which secret could be so dangerous for the sake of his own soul? It becomes apparent when he tells Lord Henry about the time when he first met Dorian Gray:

"The story is simply this, told the painter after some time. Two months ago I went to a crush at Lady Brandon's. You know we poor artists have to show ourselves in society from time to time, just to remind the public that we are not savages. With an evening coat and a white tie, as you told me once, anybody, even a stockbroker, can

gain a reputation for being civilized. Well, after I had been in the room about ten minutes, talking to huge, overdressed dowagers and tedious Academicians, I suddenly became conscious that someone was looking at me. I turns halfway round, and saw Dorian Gray for the first time. When our eyes met, I felt that I was growing pale. A curious sensation of terror came over me. I knew that I had come face to face with someone whose mere personality was so fascinating that, if I allowed it to do so, it would absorb my whole nature, my whole soul, my very art itself". (p.13)

Supposedly love at first sight. The feeling grew so strong that later, when asked about how often he saw Dorian Gray, Basil confessed: "Every day. I couldn't be happy if I didn't see him every day. He is absolutely necessary to me".

Basil dared to confess his secret devotion, and the picture was somehow a piece of evidence that made his transgression of the norm undeniable. That may be the possible reason for his not letting anyone else see it.

3.1-All the world is a stage: a view of Basil Hallward's London

Oscar Wilde set his plot in London during the Victorian Age. He constantly makes the distinction between West End and East End London very clear. We can notice such separation in the following quote from chapter I:

"(...) "Don't look so angry, Basil. It was at my aunt, Lady Agatha's. She told me she had discovered a wonderful young man, who was going to help her in the East End, and his name was Dorian Gray". (pp. 20-1)

Those are Lord Henry Wotton's words and he is referring to the famous philanthropic work some rich polite society ladies used to put into practice in favor of the large poor population that inhabited East End, in contrast with the opulent and affluent aristocracy whose mansions were located in West End. Consequently, we have two settings for the actions in Wilde's novel: West End for the daylight moral and respectable procedures; and East End for the villainies, those courses of conduct less regulated by the codes and by the canon. It is very interesting to notice that all the actions in Chapter XVI take place in East End; throughout that chapter Wilde depicts places where abuse of drugs like alcohol and opium take place, as well as prostitution. Were these the places Basil Hallward would be able

to lodge, in order to have his secret sexual encounters in London? Jerry White (2011) in the book *London in the Nineteenth Century: A Human Awful Wonder of God* (p.320) gives us the following very enlightening description:

“There were numerous brothels and accommodation houses for men. The extraordinary **White Swan** public house, **Vere Street**, Clare Market was home to the ‘Sodomitical Club’ or the Vere Street Coterie until broken up by the police in 1810. Mock weddings- and real consummations- took place mainly on Sundays, though the upstairs rooms were in action all week long. (...) the clientele was made up of a complete cross- section of London life from West End aristocrats to East End coal-heavers”. (Emphasis by the author)

It would be reasonable to say that that Basil Hallward might certainly be found in one of those gay refuges in London’s East End during his frequent absences.

Having established the setting of Basil Hallward’s character trysts, we can now address the consequences he had to face for his transgression of the norm of sexuality in Victorian society.

3.2-Performative Acts in Basil Hallward’s Gender Constitution.

Scattered along the narrative, we have found some elements that indicate the strategies of performance applied by Basil to hide his secret sexual activities and gender identity, and possibly to live secret man to man sexual adventures from time to time, as seen in this quote from chapter I:

“When I like people immensely I never tell their names to anyone. It is like surrendering a part of them. I have grown to love secrecy. It seems to be the one thing that can make modern life mysterious or marvelous to us. The commonest thing is delightful if one only hides it. When I leave town now I never tell my people where I am going. If I did, I should lose all my pleasure. It is a silly habit, I daresay, but somehow it seems to bring a great deal of romance into one’s life”. (p.10)

The text implies that Basil goes out of society in secret to find romance. If he hides that romance, it might be because it goes against the norms of binary gender and procreative sexual activity.

Just a little further, on p. 12, we can find the following words by Basil Hallward:

“Two months ago I went to a crush at Lady Brandon’s. You know we poor artists have to show ourselves in society from time to time, just to remind the public that we are not savages. With an evening coat and a white tie, as you told me once, even a stockbroker, can gain a reputation for being civilized”

Such words remind one of Judith Butler’s (1988) argument about performative acts. Basil lets it slip from his mouth that he wears a costume to appear before Victorian society in a way that gains a good or civilized reputation. We now affirm that he had a performative gender identity to appear in society as though he was just like any other person, but we have already learned from the reading that he has got a portion of secrets to hide. Later on, (chapter IV, p.58), Lord Henry Wotton seems to come to our rescue against counter arguments for the use of performative acts in gender constitution, when he says “If you want to gain a reputation, you have merely to take them (women) down to supper”; a trick many gay men have been using and use even today: going on a date with a woman, or even getting committed to one, so people may be discouraged to believe in the inevitable rumors that often arise around a single man over 30. A typical technique used by gay people that live in the closet, as Eve Sedgwick Kosofsky would affirm in *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990).

In a society that holds prejudices and artificial behaviors, people felt compelled to play parts, in order to hide their real self from the public opinion. Queer people such as Basil Hallward had even stronger reasons to behave like that, for his form of showing affection was against the norms and he ran serious risks of severe punishment in case he was discovered. Lord Henry Wotton gives a good description of the importance of representing, in order to survive in the Victorian Age:

For the canons of good society are, or should be, the same as the canons of art. Form is absolutely essential to it. It should have the dignity of a ceremony, as well as its unreality, and should combine the insincere character of a romantic play with the wit and beauty that make such plays delightful to us. Is insincerity such a terrible thing? I think not. It is merely a method by which we can multiply our personalities. (TPODG, p.164)

The multiplication of personalities opens space for several gender roles, and for gender roles different from the standards established by the body’s physiology or by the

binary gender norms of male/female sexual behavior intended for reproduction only. In the case of Basil, as long as nobody in his society came to know about it, it was good for him.

Chapter XII is a very interesting point in Wilde's novel. There, Basil says he is going away from London for six months. He intends to go to Paris, where social standards were not so restrictive. Certainly, he would not only just "shut himself up in a room and paint a great picture he had in his head". This is the chapter where he preaches a moral sermon on Dorian Gray that goes this way:

"(...) Dorian, you don't know what is said about you. I won't tell you that I want to preach to you. (...) I do want you to lead such a life as will make the world respect you. I want you to have a clean name and a fair record". (p. 170)

Perhaps, it was that way he wanted to be regarded, so that is why he would possibly hide away from society when he wanted to have sex with another man.

Anyway, Basil never arrived in Paris. Some months after he disappeared the Scotland Yard and the French police could still not agree about what had happened to him, whether he was dead or alive. And Lord Henry Wotton commented, "I suppose in about a fortnight we shall be told he has been seen in San Francisco. It is an odd thing but everyone who disappears is said to be seen at San Francisco" (p.242) Is it a mere coincidence, or by that time San Francisco had already began to gain its reputation of being a "gay Mecca"? We reserve ourselves the pleasure of letting this question linger unanswered.

At this point of the work we will give details of what happened to Basil Hallward the night he disappeared.

3.3-The consequences of Basil Hallward's transgression of the established gender norms in the Victorian Age

In such a society as that where the events narrated by Wilde in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* take place, Basil Hallward's course of conduct would not go unpunished. Foucault (1976, chapter V) elaborates on the several ways by which a social and political device he named the sexuality device would dispose of individuals' lives in case they disobeyed the

norms established by it. It is no wonder that such punishment might reach the extreme of the capital penalty, for the Bible in the Old Testament had already prescribed it in Leviticus chapter 20, vesicle 13, which reads;“And where a man lies down with a male the same as one lies down with a woman, both of them have done a detestable thing. **They should be put to death without fail.** Their own blood is upon them”⁸. (Our emphasis)

As we have inferred from our analysis of Basil Hallward’s character, he lived a very different sexual life from that prescribed by the mores of those times, and the consequences for such behavior were certain to come upon him, for he never really reached Paris or any other gay friendlier placeslike San Francisco, as Lord Henry Wotton might have alluded to. Basil himself had said, in chapter VI, p. 92-93 that “*if one lives merely for one’s self, one pays a terrible price for doing so*”, and he added that “*(he) should fancy in remorse, in suffering, in (...) well, in the consciousness of degradation*” (p. 92-93); We wish it wouldhave been the only way, in which he paid for his transgression. However, unfortunately for him, it was not.

In chapter IX, he again foresaw something was supposed to fall upon him, he said “*... well, I am punished for that, Dorian- or shall be some day*” (p.127), on the occasion Basil said those lines, he only regretted for the horrid change Dorian Gray had been through under his influence, yet, little did he know how soon his punishment would be coming into effect. Later on, in chapter XII, we find Basil Hallward rebuking Dorian Gray for his wrongdoings and receiving from the latter the invitation to look at the awful picture he had once painted, which by now had grown old and ugly as it recorded all the cruel acts Dorian Gray had committed, while Dorian remained forever young and handsome. The implications of that picture and its meanings can be the subject for another work. Anyway, after seeing the dreadful picture, something terrible happened between Dorian Gray and Basil Hallward, as narrated in chapter XIII:

“Dorian Gray glanced at the picture, and suddenly an uncontrollable feeling of hatred for Basil Hallward came over him, as though it had been suggested to him by the image on the canvas, whispered into his ear by those grinning lips. The mad passions of a hunted animal stirred within him, and he loathed the man who seated at the table more than in his life he loathed anything. He glanced wildly around. Something glimmered on the top of the painted chest that faced him. His eye fell on it. He knew what it was. It was a knife he had brought up, some days before, to cut a

⁸ From New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures, printed by Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1984, p.164.

piece of cord, and had forgotten to take away with him. He moved slowly towards it, passing Hallward as he did so. As soon as he got behind him, he seized it, and turned around. Hallward stirred in his chair as if he was going to rise. He rushed at him, and dug the knife into the great vein that is behind the ear, crushing the man's head down on the table, and stabbing again and again".(p.182)

Yes, by means of Dorian Gray's hands, Oscar Wilde killed Basil Hallward. The biblical injunction was effectively accomplished and one of the characters in the novel whose behavior was against the norm for gender and sexual behavior in Victorian society was exemplarily punished. It was not just enough to slaughter such a "pervert" as Basil; Dorian Gray did not want to be caught and charged with murder, so he blackmailed Alan Campbell, a chemistry expert, into disposing of the body by means of nitric acid, as if to obliterate Basil Hallward from existence for good. A shocking image and an even hideous display of hatred. Later on, Dorian burned Basil's clothes in a fire he had in his house. All the above is narrated in the last chapters of the book.

Were all these things mere coincidence in Wilde's novel? Did the celebrated playwright and poet have other intentions than just entertaining his readers with a fantastic novel? We leave these questions open for further analysis.

4. CONCLUSION

We expect that we were capable of giving our reader an overview of Queer Theory from its very beginnings with Feminism, then moving forward to gender studies until the present day.

As for our analysis of Basil Hallward, we had the intention to induce our readers into reasoning about the instances of prejudice, intolerance and even violence and murder committed against gay people in our society today, even though we are in the 21st century. After all the advances that have been made towards understanding differences in sexual behavior and the assumption that gender is a social and historical construction in society; there are still some gays, like Basil Hallward, who have to suffer many kinds of abuse just for behaving differently from the majority of other people. They reach out for several performative techniques, in order to live in their communities, and sometimes are denied the same rights the “heterosexuals” have, even though they may be law-abiding citizens in the modern states, paying taxes to their rulers.

Little by little though, some gay communities have emerged with political awareness of their duties and their rights under modern lay states, and we expect that laws against homophobia become a reality in all parts of the planet, so as to eradicate prejudice and crime against gays and lesbians or people of any other gender or sexual orientation. Will there come the day when we are no longer going to feel the smell of Basil Hallward’s body as it is burned under our noses? We honestly expect that day comes soon, and we hope that this work may be a further step in achieving this goal.

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