

The picture of dorian gray

Literature



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The novel, "The Picture of Dorian Gray", was written in 1891 by Oscar Wilde. In the opening chapters of the novel, we meet the central character of Dorian Gray and two other main characters, Lord Henry Wotton and Basil Hallward. The opening few chapters focus on mainly these three people, however, once we reach chapter five, the novel shifts focus into another direction and focuses on the Vane family. We are introduced to Sibyl, the young actress Dorian is in love with.

We also meet Sibyl's brother, James, who is protective of his sister and wary of the new love in her life, and their mother, Mrs Vane, a woman with whom theatre has overtaken her life. Chapter five explores different themes, such as Aestheticism vs. reality, and for the first time we are given multiple perceptions of the main character Dorian Gray. Chapter five is important to the novel as we are introduced to the new key figure of Sibyl Vane. As we learn about her, she becomes a reality to the reader.

She is no longer just a person who was spoken about previously, Wilde now gives her depth, while creating understanding and sympathy to her character. This is done in different ways. Sibyl is introduced immediately in the chapter, "Mother, mother, I am so happy! Whispered the girl... I am so happy ... and you must be happy too!" The fact that she is described initially as a "girl", gives the indication that she is not yet fully mature and that quite rightly, Dorian will not be the person he seems to be. We learn that she is infatuated with her new love interest, "I love him", she states simply.

She continues throughout the chapter to refer to Dorian, showing the impact he has had on her; only after a few meetings, she is besotted with him. A

sense of pity and dramatic irony is shown her. As we know, Dorian will have a certain influence on her and will eventually lead to her downfall, by now giving her depth in the novel, it reflects back on Dorian, how, when she eventually does commit suicide, it creates a ripple effect, consequently showing the effect that Dorian has on other people. Sibyl refers to Dorian constantly as, " Prince Charming.

This in her eyes creates an idealistic partner for her. " She was free in her prison of passion. Her prince, Prince Charming, was with her". She is somewhat deluded, by calling him, " Prince Charming", she is letting herself believe that Dorian is an perfect partner, a person who will do her no harm. Again, as we know, this is not the case. Furthermore, it also strengthens the idea that Sibyl is still young and deluded in her love for Dorian. Wilde also introduces the social inequality that was present in the 18th century.

Sibyl acts in a theatre house, often being described as, " dingy". The strength of the level of poverty that Sibyl and her family live in becomes evident straight away, " You must not think of anything but your acting. Mr Isaacs had been very good to us, and we owe him money. " Their family is not rich; they rely on the help from Mr Isaacs to see them through, giving them help to pay off their debts and such. However, Sibyl is again trapped, she has to act in order to please Mr Isaacs and her mother, " He is not a gentleman, mother, and I hate the way he talks to me.

She is not happy, again by partnering with Dorian, she feels that she may be able to break away from the plight she is in and help her family, especially as he is an aristocrat. The division of social classes is also shown through Sibyl

herself, when she doubts Dorian really loves her, " But what does he see in me? I am not worthy of him... so much beneath him". In those times, classes married within their own class, it was unlikely for a upper class member to marry beneath him. Sibyl realises this, but disregards it soon after, again showing her naivety.

In the opening chapters, the characters were all high members of society, now in chapter five, a total contrast is brought forwards. This is emphasised further on when Sibyl is walking in the park with her brother James. An open carriage passes by with Dorian inside. While Sibyl and James talk about her Dorian's moment of passing by, " A lady standing close to her tittered". Society is portrayed here, how lower classes were looked down on, Wilde again showing social attitudes and opinions on different people.

This further adds to the novel depth, as it shows an entire contrast between classes, Dorian higher up, while Sibyl remains lower down. James, Sibyl's brother is also introduced. He is of important significance in this chapter as he plays the, 'anti-hero'. As Sibyl quite rightly states, " Everybody likes him", however Dorian, although not physically right now has come across his match. Here we are shown to the one person so far in the place that isn't influenced by Dorian. Mrs Vane, although she has never met Dorian, she is interested in his wealth.

James is wary of him, " this young dandy who was making love to her could mean her no good" By introducing a character who is not influenced by Dorian, Wilde shows the limits of power Dorian has, despite everyone thinking otherwise. By portraying a realistic character, Wilde poses the

theme of aestheticism vs. reality. There is a power play in process, Dorian representing aestheticism while James representing reality, both vying for Sibyl's attention. This is also linked into the different perceptions, which will be considered more in depth later on.

Connecting to the link of social classes, James shows his further dislike of Dorian related to his position in society, " He was a gentleman, and he hated him for that, hated him though some curious race-instinct for which he could not account, and which for that reason was all the more dominant within him". James warns Sibyl of Dorian also because of this.

This strengthens the case of James being the, 'anti-hero', he is going against the one person that everyone likes; however he himself has an innate instinct of the true Dorian. He fears for his sister, even though he is young, James remains consistently protective of his sister. He continues trying to convince his love struck sister, " He wants to enslave you... beware". Quite rightly, Dorian simply uses Sibyl in his forthcoming journey.

James also represents Dorian's apparent downfall, vowing to, " if he ever does you any wrong, I shall kill him", showing an explicit declaration to protect his sister, " If this man wrongs my sister, I will find out who he is, track him down, and kill him like a dog. I swear it. " In conclusion, chapter five of the novel brings with it different themes and ideas which are highly significant to the rest of the plot. It shows the influence Dorian has over people while offering a view on new characters, which are part of the novel.