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## A. Introduction

“Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril.” (DG<sup>1</sup> 4)

Oscar Wilde's works have fascinated writers, directors and audiences all over the world. Despite the fact that he has been criticised for his immoral lifestyle and his relationships with young men, his literary output, including plays, poems and a novella, still inspires the masses. In his introduction to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Irvine Welsh states that

[a]s a writer, Oscar Wilde has never gone out of fashion and, indeed, is probably now as popular as ever. His devastating wit, his sense of the artist as an aesthete and his personal life as an unlikely martyr for sexual liberation; they all serve to keep him at the front of our collective consciousness in a way that very few authors have matched.

(DG ix)

In this context, it is Wilde's only novel *Dorian Gray* which entices filmmakers over and over again to adapt the work for the screen; adaptations are ranging from television productions to major motion pictures. But why is it that more than one hundred and twenty years after it was published the book still attracts so much interest? What is more, following the assumption that “[t]he book is *always* better than the movie” (Cahir, *Approaches* 13), the question arises whether a film adaptation of *Dorian Gray* can do justice to its source text and how directors attempted to achieve this.

Basically, this thesis is divided into three main sections. Section 1 is based on the question: what defines an adaptation and what advantages and disadvantages are connected to the choice of the medium of film? This paper will provide an overview over the theoretical approaches regarding the topic of adaptation in order to create a methodological framework for the subsequent analysis of films. At its core, this framework will consist of the theories/definitions provided by Linda Costanzo Cahir, Linda Hutcheon, James M. Welsh and Gerard Génette and will evolve around the

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper, the abbreviation 'DG' will refer to Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

following questions: how has the novel been transferred to the screen? What changes have been made to the original story and why? And what transtextual relationships connect the film to its source text and other media? Section 2 will then discuss Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and the critical reception by its readership in 1890 in order to explain why Victorian audiences have received his work so negatively. Furthermore, the novel's plot, characters and main themes will be examined and defined before the thesis turns to the filmic transformations of *Dorian Gray*. It will provide a chronological overview over film adaptations that have been produced up to the present including silent films, Black and White movies as well as the latest Technicolor versions. Finally, Section 3 of this study will deal with the analysis of nine adaptations which have been carefully chosen for the purpose of this thesis. Categorized under 'literal', 'traditional' and 'radical' translations, the films will be analysed according to the above-mentioned, theoretical framework. The analysis shall indicate in what way Oscar Wilde's novel was transformed to the screen and how the filmmakers altered the text in order to highlight its main themes or whether the directors predominantly focussed on realizing their own interpretations of the novel. To conclude, this paper will aim to summarize the main findings of the analysis and to provide an outlook for future adaptation studies on film adaptations of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

## 1. Theory of Adaptation

### 1.1. Defining Adaptation

What is an adaptation? In order to build the theoretical framework for this thesis, the first step must be to define what 'adaptation' actually means. In its most basic sense, following the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "to adapt" means to "make (something) suitable for a new use or purpose" or "to become adjusted to new conditions". With regard to the context of this paper it means that a literary text (Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*) is taken and "made suitable" for the new purpose of a film. Throughout this paper, when I speak of 'adaptation' I refer specifically to a screen adaptation.

Theorists from the field of film and adaptation studies agree overall on a definition of the term 'adaptation'. Erica Sheen, for example, argues that an adaptation is "the transfer of an 'original' (literary) text from one context of production to an (audio-visual) other" (*Introduction 2*). In another definition, Lisa Hopkins says that a screen adaptation (as well as any other adaptation) involves "a work of art originally conceived for one medium and 'translating' it to fit another" (1). In *Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon elaborates further that "an adaptation can be described as an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works, a creative and interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging or an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work" (8). Support for this "interpretive act" that Hutcheon mentions comes from Dudley Andrew, who stated in *Film Adaptation* that "the process of adaptation has much in common with interpretation theory for in a strong sense adaptation is the appropriation of a meaning from a prior text" (29).

The link with interpretation theory becomes obvious when one takes a further look at the above-mentioned dictionary definition of the verb 'to adapt': to make something suitable for a new context obviously involves an interpretative act or making changes to the original text. According to Hutcheon, "[a]daptation is repetition, but repetition without replication" (7), and she furthermore adds that "as a process of creating, the act of adaptation always involves both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation" (8). A fuller discussion of the theoretical issues linked to adaptation will follow later in this paper

because first we will look at the history of film adaptation and adaptation studies.

## 1.2. Historical Overview

The tradition of adapting literature to the medium of film goes back to the turn of the twentieth century. James M. Welsh states that early movies “were ‘imitating’ or ‘replicating’ historical events in documentary-styled ‘actualities’” (xx), because early cinema audiences expected films to prove “fidelity” and “authenticity” (Welsh xx). The French films d’art (1908) or Italian historical pictures (1909)<sup>2</sup> were on of the first adaptations from literature to the screen and contributed significantly to the constantly growing importance of adaptations for the film industry (Naremore 4). After that literature gradually became a powerful influence for American and mainstream French cinema at the end of the silent movie era which lasted from 1895 to 1929 (Andrew 35).

With the introduction of talkies in the late 1920s, the big Hollywood studios showed an increasing interest in adapting literature for their films (Naremore 4). Since literature was regarded as superior to the medium of film among middle-class viewers, the capitalist movie industry tried to achieve a certain status by focussing on adaptations of prestigious literature. Many adaptations took their stories from texts (novels, plays etc.) which belonged to the literary canon, and Victorian novels especially, with their “rich, complex explorations of life’s great questions”, have been an inspiration for various directors (Clarke 39). Hopkins argues in *Relocating Shakespeare and Austen on Screen*, published in 2008, that filmmakers assumed, if audiences were already familiar with traditional titles and stories, these works would also translate into popular films (5). Especially between 1934 and 1951 Hollywood based a great deal of its productions on literary texts, a period which Guerric DeBona calls “Hollywood-as-a-literary chapter” (8). The Vitagraph film company in New York, in particular, tried to lure viewers into the cinema by supporting the productions of one-reel Shakespeare or Dante adaptations<sup>3</sup>.

Initiated by the increasing popularity of literary adaptations in Hollywood in the

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<sup>2</sup> Judith Buchanan states that in 1909 Charles Pathé founded the “Italian studio Film d’Arte Italiana” as a reaction to the French films d’art (53).

<sup>3</sup> See Uricchio, Pearson. This work deals extensively with the above-mentioned focus on literature in early cinema adaptations.

1950s, the perception of film as an academic issue started to change. James Naremore mentions that “film was being regarded [...] as the quintessentially modernist medium” (5). Theorists soon began to regard cinema as “the dominant ‘way of seeing’ in the modern world and as a condition towards which most of the visual and literary arts aspired” (Naremore 5). Following this development and based on the rising interest in, and importance of, literary sources for film adaptations, theorists of the early 1950s no longer regarded cinema as “impure” but concentrated on academic writings about prestigious film adaptations of classic novels (Lev, *Future* 335). The first comprehensive work about film adaptations was written by George Bluestone and published in America in 1957: *Novels into Film: The Metamorphosis of Fiction into Cinema* (Naremore 6). Peter Lev argues that ever since the works of theorists like George Bluestone or André Bazin “the analysis of film adaptation has spread out in several directions, including Shakespeare and film, modern language studies and film, cultural studies of various kinds, intertextuality and postmodernism” (*Future* 335). From 1960 onwards, the number of theoretical writings on adaptation increased (Naremore 7).

Two approaches were important to adaptation studies during the 1960s: on the one hand, the Bluestone approach, which “relies on an implicit metaphor of translation governing all investigations of how codes move across sign systems” (Naremore 7) and comparing the literary and the cinematic forms. The auteurist approach, on the other hand, pays attention to “textual fidelity” (like the Bluestone approach) but focuses more on “difference rather than similarity, individual styles rather than formal systems” (8). Welsh points out that it took a long time for cinema studies to come of age academically. This did not happen until the 1970s and was triggered by the so-called “film generation” (xxv) in the 1960s, “picking up on the excitement created by the inventive filmmakers of the French New Wave and their ‘Second Wave’ counterparts in Britain, Eastern Europe, and, finally, Das Neue Kino in Germany” (xxvi).

Ever since the 1960s adaptation studies have been recognised and regarded as a field of study in their own right and have been the focus of various courses, papers and academic inquiry. Peter Lev suggests that it is important for adaptation studies to follow the direction of “hybridity” and include “paintings, photographs, news articles,

historical events, films, television shows“ in the list of sources in order not to “[lose] some of the richness of this impure art by limiting sources to novels and plays” (*Future* 335-336). Further, Cardwell suggests that the future of adaptation studies “lies in exploring a vital and fertile area of aesthetics, contributing new questions, research, perspectives, and ideas to the study of literacy, filmic, and televisual arts” (51). In addition, as James Naremore argues, “[t]he study of adaptation needs to be joined with the study of recycling, remaking. [...] By this means, adaptation will become part of a general theory of repetition, and adaptation studies will move from the margins to the centre of contemporary media studies” (15).

### 1.3. Adaptation Studies - Theoretical and Practical Issues

In his introduction to the 2007 *The Literature/Film Reader: Issues of Adaptation*, Welsh says that “[a]daptation has always been central to the process of film-making [...] and could well maintain its dominance into the cinema’s second century” (xiii). He states that about 85 per cent of stories for films are based on literature (xiii). Additionally, Lev claims that “[a]daptation study can bring light to neglected works of literature that nevertheless have sophistication worthy of serious study” (*Vertigo* 175).

But why do movies use already existing stories rather than inventing new ones? In *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* by Marshal McLuhan, an answer to this question is put forward: “the content of a new medium [...] is always an old medium” (vii). Robert B. Ray adds that “written narratives appropriate oral tales just as the movies borrow from books and television from film” (42). What is more, as mentioned in the previous section, filmmakers saw in the adaptation of popular titles a perfect opportunity to use the novels’ popularity to promote films (McFarlane, *Novel* 7). Although early films, as for example silent movie versions of Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, were only poor and flat versions of the original text and comedies rather than sophisticated stories, these movies succeeded in bringing “literary properties to a public that otherwise would not bother to read them” (Tibbetts and Welsh xiv).

Despite the fact that film has now existed for over a century, its relationship to

literature is still widely discussed by theorists (Sheen, *Introduction* 1). Further, critics have pondered the accuracy and validity of the cinematic transfer from its written source, instead of judging a film on its own merits. Why adapt a novel and how? Which is better, the book or the film? What are the possibilities of one medium or the other? And can one of them actually be superior to the other medium? Questions like these have concerned theorists ever since the 1970s and have been the subject of many theoretical writings centred around the similarities and differences between these two arts forms. Some of these aspects/questions will be discussed in the following section.

### 1.3.1. Literature vs. Film

To begin with, it has to be said that film and literature share certain similarities concerning form, syntax, genre and subject matter (Cahir, *Approaches* 45). Film and literature are both capable of telling a story, developing a plot; in short, they both share the “capacity for narrative” (McFarlane, *Novel* 12). However, as Hutcheon argues, “telling a story is not the same as showing a story” (52). According to Bluestone, movies “‘metamorphose’ novels into another medium that has its own formal or narratological possibilities”, and even more so a novel and its adaptation “represent different aesthetic genera” (5). Robert Stam claims that “although some broad genres (comedy, tragedy, and melodrama) are shared between novel and film, other genres are specifically filmic” (69). These genres, animated cartoons for example, can only work with a moving image. By contrast, literary features such as interior monologues, which illustrate a character’s emotions and thoughts are rather a literary device and can only be created on screen through voice-overs (Hutcheon 58). In addition, Dudley Andrew argues that film and literature work on “opposite” levels (32). He says that

[g]enerally film is found to work from perception toward signification, from external facts to interior motivations and consequences, from the givenness of a world to the meaning of a story cut out of that world. Literary fiction works oppositely. It begins with signs (graphemes and words), building to propositions that attempt to develop perception. (32)

Films can bring to life what would otherwise only be constructed by the readers' imagination (in their minds), given the 'restrictions' of a literary text. Hutcheon for example describes how “[t]he power of [a] close-up [...] can [be used] for powerful and revealing interior ironies” (59). Furthermore, she adds that “film can also create visual, externalized analogues to subjective elements – fantasy or magic realism – by such techniques as slow motion, rapid cutting, distortional lenses (fish-eye, telephoto), lighting, or the use of various kinds of film stocks [...]”. A film is also said to “maintain a greater degree of immediacy than we generally expect or encounter in literature” (Poague 83). Hutcheon argues that “cinema is indeed capable flashbacks and flashforwards, and its very immediacy can make shifts potentially more effective than in prose fiction” (63). Besides, she mentions that films using a first-person narrative to make the audience understand what the main character sees are “infrequent” (54), although first-person narrative is used quite frequently in literature. As far as descriptions of character or setting are concerned, novels need time to develop certain features and characteristics of characters in a story, whereas these details are “concurrently present” in a movie (61-62).

### **1.3.1.1. Expectations and Challenges**

Adapting a work of literature, especially a novel considered a classic or a ‘masterpiece’, can be daunting for a filmmaker. Audience expectations have to be met if not exceeded in order to produce a successful movie. James Naremore argues that Hollywood adaptations could probably “not achieve the importance of their literary forebears” (7), and “Hollywood 'originals' [...] could never be so perfect as plays or novels”. Moreover, he states that “some of the best movie directors deliberately avoid adaptations of great literature in order to foreground their own artistry” (7). Bluestone, however, argues that “changes are inevitable the moment one abandons the linguistic for the visual medium” (5). Hutcheon adds, “writing a screenplay based on a great novel [...] is foremost a labour of simplification. [...] A film has to convey its message by images or relatively few words; it has little tolerance for complexity or irony or tergiversations” (1). Multiple

episodes or an immense range of characters are also impossible to include since a filmmaker is obliged to fit everything into a one-reel feature film (Wise vii). Micael M. Clarke states that an adaptation has to “communicate meanings derived through one system of signification (textual) by means of a system (cinematic) that operates differently on most levels” (39).

The predominant assumption in adaptation theory is that no matter in which form it comes, an adaptation is usually treated as less important or inferior to its source (Hutcheon xii). Wendy Everett recognises the disregard for cinematic adaptations and calls into question the justification of this view, stating that this “outmoded privileging of literature over cinema and its tendency to reduce both to simple story line and character [...] may more worryingly reveal a fundamental lack of understanding what filmic identity might be; of the nature and specificity of film itself” (149-150). Theorists like Linda Hutcheon or Sarah Cardwell argue against a comparative approach to adaptation studies because it might lead to the assumption that the film has to satisfy the expectations that come with the novel, and rather than examining both media from the outside a comparative approach can only achieve a limited view from the inside (Cardwell 52). Cardwell is of the opinion that by restrictively comparing the film to its source text relevant contextual features are often ignored in the analysis and that “our attentive responsiveness to the film as an artwork is reduced” (52). Hutcheon further says that adaptations are not “derivative” or “second-rate” (169) but simply stories that are told and retold, and which change through the process of being repeated: they are not second-rate or inferior to their original text. “[A]daptation is the norm, not the exception” (177). Furthermore it is said that the source text is often granted authority over its film adaptation, but Hutcheon emphasizes that “there is no such thing as a literal translation, there can be no literal adaptation. [...] Transpositions to other mediums always mean change” (16).

The problem of film being regarded as second rate remains, since adaptations are often studied from a literary perspective. The source text is therefore regarded as superior to the medium of film and often judged by whether the adaptation was faithful to the source text or not (Leitch, *Literacy* 17). Since this study is written from the

perspective of the study of literature, a comparative approach will be necessary – despite being regarded as limited and subjective by theorists like Hutcheon or Cardwell. With any kind of review there are inevitable issues raised due to the perspectives and tastes of the commentator. Bearing in mind that I will not treat adaptations as inferior to the novel, but as equally important for the purposes of my thesis, I will try to evaluate how the “pleasure of the original representation [is prolonged]” because, as John Ellis states, “the adaptation trades upon the memory of the novel, a memory that can derive from actual reading, or, as is more likely with a classic of literature, a generally circulated cultural memory [...] the faithfulness of the adaptation is the degree to which it can rework and replace a memory” (4).

### **1.3.2. The Issue of Fidelity and the Myth of the 'Unfilmable'**

Whereas in the previous sections this paper attempted to provide a definition for adaptation and to give an overview of historical developments and theoretical issues concerning adaptations and film in general, the following sections will examine more fully the theoretical perspectives from which an adaptation can be analysed and evaluated. The findings in this and the subsequent sections will constitute the main framework for the analysis of the *Dorian Gray* films in Chapter Three.

Linda Hutcheon states that “fidelity criticism' was for a long time the “critical orthodoxy” in adaptation studies” (6-7), especially when works belonging to the literary canon were concerned (7). Adaptation criticism revolved mainly around the question: “how close was the film to the book?” (Hopkins 6). The focus on fidelity grew with the increasing success of literary adaptations during the second half of the twentieth century (Kranz and Mellerski 1).

Many writings have since been published which contradict this notion and which argue against the focus on fidelity, but the topic remains a subject of intense and controversial discussions. Most theorists today, like Cardwell or McFarlane, claim that the question of fidelity should no longer play a role in film analysis. However, as late as 2000, Erica Sheen wrote in favour of fidelity as the “primary critical point of reference”

(*Introduction* 2) and said that faithfulness played an important role in evaluating the effectiveness of a literary adaptation. To her, the “critical standard [...] is that of fidelity; ‘faithfulness to the text’” (*Faithfulness* 14). Further, she argues that “[t]he concept of faithfulness has *significance* within the transmission of an adaptation, not just *significance* within the analysis of it as a text” (*Faithfulness* 16). In addition, theorists like Welsh and Lev (*The Literature/Film Reader: Issues of Adaptation*) or Cahir (*Literature into Film: Theory and Practical Approaches*) still take the issue of fidelity into consideration. In 2008, Cahir stated that “in assessing the merits of any translation, faithfulness to the source text is the virtue most frequently in request, the quality most valued” (*In/Fidelity* 199), but also pointed out that the issue of fidelity is a complex one.

The view that faithfulness should be included in critical analyses of film is criticised by McFarlane, who claims that academic writing dealing with adaptation has been “inhibited and blurred” (*Novel* 194) by “the near fixation with the issue of fidelity” (*Novel* 194). Additionally, he criticizes that the dominance of fidelity in the field of adaptation studies has suppressed more “rewarding approaches” which share the idea of “adaptation as an example of convergence among the arts” (10). The approach of fidelity does not pay any attention to features that may be highly important for film but do not play a role in novels (10), such as music and special effects. Welsh, too, is of the opinion that fidelity is a “basic and banal focus in evaluating adaptations” (xiv) but recognizes that it remains a background topic in many academic writings. Although adaptation theorists today are aware of the dangers and limits of an approach that focuses on fidelity, there is a strange contradiction between the rejection of faithfulness and at the same time “an often-unconscious unwillingness to move beyond the issue of fidelity” (Hurst 173).

First of all a few questions need to be asked: why does fidelity play such an important role in many theoretical writings about film adaptation? How can it be achieved? And why is it desirable or undesirable? Faithfulness mainly became a central issue for theorists especially because spectators usually expect a film to reproduce the source text as faithfully as possible and to remain true to the “spirit of a text” (Andrew 32). By demanding fidelity to the novel, however, one easily forgets that novel and film,

despite sharing some similarities, are two different media. McFarlane argues that fidelity is not “possible or desirable” (*Book 6*), because in order to produce a faithful transformation of a literary text, the text would need to have a “fixed meaning” (*Book 6*). Literature, like film, is always open to interpretation and the same text can contain several different meanings.

Some theorists, however, will still argue for “‘fidelity, accuracy, and truth’ as being essential components for evaluating adaptations” (Welsh xxv). But can such accuracy and truth be achieved in film? Welsh points out that despite the common belief that everything in one medium can be transformed into another, of course, film has its limitations (xv). Narrative and novelistic techniques such as “[s]hades of nuance in ‘voice’ and tone, for example, could prove problematic” and therefore add to the “myth of the unfilmable” (Welsh xv).

How should a film adaptation then be fully faithful to its source text? And if so, why should one go and see the film rather than re-read the novel? James M. Welsh gives a list of questions which are important to the analysis of a literary adaptation:

How was the story told? How is it retold? How is it to be sold? Is the point of view a particular problem because of a first-person narrator (however limited by relationship or circumstance) or a third-person omniscient narrator? Is the story completely told? If not, has it been intelligently abridged, but if so, was anything lost as a consequence? Do the characters appear much as most readers might expect? Has the story’s meaning been changed and, if so, in what way or ways and to what degree? Has fidelity to tone and nuance been scrupulously observed? [...] Finally, has the film adaptation been true to the “spirit” of the original (subjective and problematic though such an assessment may be)? (Welsh xxiii-xxiv)

Welsh mentions fidelity, amongst a number of other criteria, as the central part of an adaptation. However, he states, one has to be careful about what the filmmaker has to remain faithful to - namely “fidelity to tone and nuance”<sup>4</sup>. In this context, Bazin argues that a literal translation of a novel is not necessarily a faithful one (*Cinema* 127), especially because, in most cases, it is simply impossible to do a literal transformation of a text regarding the different possibilities of the different media of film and literature.

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<sup>4</sup>Also see Stam: “Faithful to what?” (57).

'Classic novels' in particular prove difficult when turned into feature-film length and fidelity to details of the novel becomes a problematic issue. Crucial changes to the original text often lead to disappointment with the audience that watches the adaptation. This assumption also goes back to a number of articles published by Lester Asheim in 1952 dealing with adaptations of classic novels<sup>5</sup> for the silver screen. Concerning faithfulness he found out that most adapted films had mainly two things in common: first of all, films will usually retain parts of the novel's structure and most of the basic plot-line. Secondly the ending, whether happy or unhappy, remains unchanged in more than fifty per cent of all movies analysed (*Summary* 269). Moreover, and maybe most obviously, almost all films retain the original title of the novel no matter how many changes might occur in the film adaptation (*Summary* 270).

Hopkins argues that more often than not the more successful films were adaptations which allowed "radical change[s]" to the original and which were "[liberated] from unhelpful ideas" (Hopkins 7). Welsh and Tibbetts agree on this and claim that faithfulness is important, but changes of the original work do not mean that the source text is not transformed successfully (xx). Furthermore, Bazin says that even if the film is not a success this is not necessarily due to an unfaithful adaptation (20).

Our understanding of 'adaptation' is different from what we actually mean when we say an adaptation has been unfaithful to the novel. Absolute faithfulness would mean the film is a mere copy or imitation of the source text (Berg 101) which is clearly not desirable for an adaptation. As argued above, the notion of fidelity would include the assumption that there is one true 'correct' meaning to a text. However, every text can contain various meanings and therefore 'absolute faithfulness' is simply impossible. What is inherently more important for a successful adaptation is faithfulness to the "spirit" or "essence" of the source text (McFarlane, *Novel* 9).

McFarlane continues to say that the fidelity approach is "a doomed enterprise and

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<sup>5</sup> Asheim's study was based on the film adaptations of the following novels: *Pride and Prejudice*, *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, *The Good Earth*, *Victory*, *David Copperfield*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *In This Our Life*, *The House of the Seven Gables*, *For Whom the Bell Toll*, *Les Miserables*, *The Light That Failed*, *Main Street* (filmed as *I Married A Doctor*) *The Sea Wolf*, *Of Human Bondage*, *Kitty Foyle*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Alice Adams*, *The Magnificent Ambersons*, *Anna Karenina*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Tom Sawyer* and *The Virginian* (*Appeal*, 335).

fidelity criticism unilluminating” (*Novel* 9), because the same adaptation can be regarded as faithful or unfaithful to the source text: an analysis of an adaptation based on this would therefore lead to a rather subjective result. Our notion of what makes an adaptation faithful or unfaithful often simply relies on our feelings towards the source novel, judging on how the film has met our expectations. According to Stam, we already have built our own “imaginary mise-en-scène of the novel on the private stages of our minds” (54). If the film adaptation proves to be different from the image we had in our minds, we will regard the adaptation as unsuccessful and also unfaithful to the original work. This is also why Stam continues to argue that “the notion of the fidelity of an adaptation to its source novel does not contain a grain of truth” (54).

To sum up, it can be said that the tendency in adaptation studies is to move away from the notion of fidelity by accepting the given limitations to both the film and the literary medium. However, fidelity cannot be completely excluded from the process of evaluating an adaptation. It has been a concern of many theorists, and despite their criticism of faithfulness and truth there are just as many arguments for as against fidelity. As the success of a film also depends on the reception by its audience, the issue of fidelity cannot be completely ignored. Audiences will judge a film to the extent to which it has met their expectations. The central question should therefore not revolve around a strict adherence to the source text but instead should take into account the spirit, original tone and rhythm of the novel (Andrew 32). In other words, although screenwriters and directors cannot be fully faithful to the source text, they can translate the novel in a way that it retains “equivalence in the meaning of forms” (Bazin, *Adaptation* 20), or, as Robert Stam expresses it, “an adaptation should be faithful not so much to the source text, but rather to the essence of the medium of expression” (58).

Bazin goes on to claim that “all it takes is for the filmmakers to have enough visual imagination to create the cinematic equivalent of the style of the original, and for the critic to have the eyes to see it” (*Adaptation* 20). Following Bazin's assumption that “the film is intended to take its place alongside the book” and that the novel is not superior to the medium of film (qtd. in DeBona 1), fidelity can be included in a theoretical framework for analysing adaptations. I want to clarify though that I do not assume that

an adaptation is successful or unsuccessful according to the degree of how literal the translation is. Instead, I will follow Bazin's and Stam's notions of fidelity as a degree of transferring meaning from one medium to another. Welsh's question of how the source text is transferred to the screen will also be included in the analysis.

Fidelity, of course, cannot be the only criterion upon which the films in this thesis will be analysed and can therefore only play a minor role in the evaluation of adaptations. It will be more interesting to see how filmmakers 'transformed' and 'translated' the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* into films and what techniques they used to do so.

### 1.3.3. Types, Modes, and Ways of Adaptation

In the previous section we experienced that focusing solely on fidelity is an incomplete and ultimately frustrating way of looking at adaptations. Films can be very different from their source novels and still be successful adaptations. They are often "condensed versions, summaries [or] film 'digests'" as André Bazin calls them (*Adaptation* 21). Robert Stam therefore suggests a different trope of adaptation, namely "translation", which includes a "principled effort of intersemiotic transposition, with the inevitable losses and gains typical of any translation" (62). However, 'translation' does not mean that the adaptation is expected to be a literal translation of the source text. Linda Costanzo Cahir states that in contrast to an adaptation, a translation moves a text from one "language" to another; i.e. the language of film versus the language of the novel (*In/Fidelity* 198).

The film "text" produced is a completely independent entity but the spectator is still able to appreciate and understand the translation. Cahir claims that "[e]very act of translation is simultaneously an act of interpretation" and that "[f]ilm translators of literature face the same challenges, dilemmas, interpretive choices, latitudes, and responsibilities that any translator must face" (*In/Fidelity* 199). Consequently, a translation involves recreating a work for a different audience: an audience that the

original writer did not envisage. Cahir introduces three “modes of translation”<sup>6</sup>, which constitute different methods of translating literature into film:

1. Literal translation: which reproduces the plot and all its attending details as closely as possible to the letter of the book;
2. traditional translation: which maintains the overall traits of the book (its plot, settings, and stylistic conventions) but revamps particular details in ways that the filmmakers see as necessary and fitting;
3. radical translation: which reshapes the book in extreme and revolutionary ways, both as a means of interpreting the literature and of making the film a more fully independent work.  
(*In/Fidelity* 200)

What is more, Cahir suggests that these three translation modes may be used separately or together in a film translation. She goes on to argue that “one translation mode will normally dominate in a movie” (*In/Fidelity* 201). These modes will be used to define the structure for the analysis part of this paper since the films will be categorized according to Cahir's method.

Stam delves deeper than Cahir and argues for “translation” as a single trope for adaptation and consequently lists a whole “constellation of tropes”: translation, reading, dialogization, cannibalization, transmutation, transfiguration and signifying (62). Each of those tropes can be used to deal with further aspects of adaptation. The trope of reading for example can lead to different versions of the same story, as different readings are possible for the same text because “reading” and understanding a text also involve the ability to read between the lines and to “see beyond and between the words on the page, to engage creatively with the silences and intervals that lie at its heart” (Everett 152-153). Additionally, Naremore says that some directors focus on ‘reading’ the source text rather than staying faithful to the original (12).

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<sup>6</sup> A very similar approach was presented by Geoffrey Wagner already in 1975 in his book *The Novel and the Cinema*. He defined three modes of adaptation, namely: “transposition” (222), “commentary” (223) and “analogy” (227), which, in a basic sense, can be understood as literal, traditional and radical ways of adaptation. For this paper, however, I decided to follow Cahir’s more recent definition of translation modes. Therefore, a more elaborate definition of her translation modes will precede each of the three parts of the analysis below.

Another, and as Leitch states, more common, approach to adaptation studies is concerned with “adjustment” (*Discontents* 98). In order to transform a novel and make it more suitable for film, multiple strategies have to be applied. Changes are therefore always necessary in the adapting process and have to be taken into account when an adaptation is analysed. Linda Hutcheon describes the dilemma of screenwriter “Charlie Kaufman” in the film *Adaptation*: “[...] what is involved in adapting can be a process of appropriation, of taking possession of another’s story, and filtering it, in a sense, through one’s own sensibility, interests and talents. Therefore, adapters are first interpreters and then creators” (18).

Hutcheon suggests a method of looking at adaptations by introducing “modes of engagement”, in which an adaptation is not only defined as a product but also as a process. In this model she differentiates between “transcoding” and “a creative reinterpretation and palimpsestic intertextuality” (22). The three modes are “telling-showing-performance”:

In the telling mode – in narrative literature, for example – our engagement begins in the realm of imagination, which is simultaneously controlled by the selected, directing words of the text and liberated – that is, unconstrained by the limits of the visual or aural. [...] But with the move to the mode of showing, as in film or stage adaptations, we are caught in an unrelenting, forward-driving story. And we have moved from the imagination to the realm of direct perception – with its mix of both detail and broad focus. The performance mode teaches us that language is not the only way to express meaning or to relate stories. Visual and gestural representations are rich in complex associations. (Hutcheon 23)

Similarly to Cahir’s translation modes, the “modes of engagement” are usually not working separately from each other, but each of them can “aim at and achieve certain things better than others” (24). In addition, Hutcheon argues that rather than focusing on one medium these three modes make it possible to gain deeper insight into adaptation processes and help to provide a more thorough analysis of the film adaptation of a literary text.

### 1.3.4. Intertextuality

“[T]exts are made of unlimited semiosis and unlimited intertextuality.”  
(Rocco Capozzi 412)

Many recent approaches to adaptation studies focus on the issue of intertextuality. Darlene J. Sadlier argues that every adaptation involves a source text which is appropriated for the screen and because intertextuality has always been present in the field of adaptation and film studies, every adaptation can naturally be studied under its spotlight (192). Filmmakers used “intertextual adaptive strategies” as early as the beginning of the twentieth century (DeBona 11), meaning that they included intertextual references from “classic works such as [...] *Faust*, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, *Hamlet*, *Robinson Crusoe* [...]” (11) in their films. Those “adaptive strategies”, as DeBona calls it, include for example to change the title, alter scenes, remove or add characters, include text lines from other sources, and so on.

In a film adaptation, intertextuality is not only present through the adaptation of a source text but often a wide range of different intertextual references are added to the screenplay itself. In many ‘modern’ film versions of classic texts the main story is usually altered and contains references from many different fields such as art or music. The different types of intertextuality together with an introductory overview over definitions of intertextuality will be at the centre of the following sections.

#### 1.3.4.1. Origins and Dialogism

The term 'intertextuality' was first introduced by Julia Kristeva in the 1960s following Saussure and Bakhtin's theory of dialogism (Allen 3), which was defined in four essays on language and the novel between 1935 and 1941. The Bakhtinian assumption is that the novel is a “developing genre” and that it “permits the incorporation of various genres, both artistic (inserted short stories, lyrical songs, poems, dramatic scenes, etc.), extra artistic (everyday, rhetorical, scholarly, religious genres) and others” (Bakhtin 320). In addition, Bakhtin defines (intertextual) dialogism by stating that “[e]verything means, is

understood, as a part of a greater whole – there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others. [...] [The] dialogic imperative, mandated by the pre-existence of the language world relative to any of its current inhabitants, insures that there can be no actual monologue” (426). Allen points out that at the core of Bakhtin's work there is the argument that the

dialogic, heteroglot aspects of language are essentially threatening to any unitary, authoritarian and hierarchical conception of society, art and life. If language is socially specific and this embodies the stratifications, unfinalized interpretations, ideological positions and class conflicts at work in society in any epoch, and indeed at any specific moment, then no attempt to explain language or art through an abstract system of generalizable relations is visible for those wishing to understand language, art, even speech acts. It is this vision of human society and communication which stands behind the term 'intertextuality'. (Allen 29)

The 'dialogic aspect' mentioned by Bakhtin is also incorporated in Robert Stam's essay “Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation”, which appeared in 2000 in *Film Adaptation*. He describes the intertextual relationship between a film and its source text as an almost “dialogic way”:

Adaptations, then, can take an activist stance toward their source novels, inserting them into a much broader intertextual dialogism. An adaptation, in this sense, is less an attempted resuscitation of an originary work than a turn in an ongoing dialogical process. The concept of intertextual dialogism suggests that every text forms an intersection of textual surfaces. All texts are tissues of anonymous formulae, variations on those formulae, conscious and unconscious quotations, and conflations and inversions of other texts [...] [I]ntertextual dialogism refers to the infinite and open-ended possibilities generated by all the discursive practices of a culture, the entire matrix of communicative utterances within which the artistic text is situated [...]. (Stam 64)

#### **1.3.4.2. Transtextual Relationships**

In his work *Palimpsests* of 1982, Gérard Genette introduces “five types of transtextual relationships” (1), of which intertextuality is only one type defined to discuss adaptations. According to him, transtextuality describes everything that “puts one text in relation with other texts” (*Palimpsests* 1). He recognizes that “the object of poetics is not the (literary) text but its textual transcendence, its textual links with other texts” (Prince ix).

Additionally, Genette argues that “any text is a hypertext, grafting itself onto a hypotext, an earlier text that it imitates or transforms; any writing is rewriting; any literature is always second degree” (Prince ix). This notion also corresponds with what has been defined previously as the core elements of every literary adaptation. In this sense, every film adaptation of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a hypertext and therefore has a transtextual relationship with Oscar Wilde’s novel, which serves as the hypotext.

Genette begins by listing “intertextuality” as the first of five types of “transtextuality”. Intertextuality describes “a relationship of co-presence between two texts or among several texts” (1) and can appear in its most basic sense in the form of a quotation. To go even further Genette defines intertextuality as the “practice of *allusion*”: “an enunciation whose full meaning presupposes the perception of a relationship between it and another text, to which it necessarily refers by some inflections that would otherwise remain unintelligible” (2). That is to say in order to understand the full meaning of a text (to ‘read between the lines’) the reader is required to possess a certain background knowledge. Secondly, Genette explains “paratextuality” which is concerned with the relationship between a text and its “paratext”. Paratexts are “titles, prefaces, postfaces, epigraphs, dedications [...], all the messages and commentaries that come to surround the text and become virtually indistinguishable from it” (2). Those paratexts can create meaning for they might indicate a reference to another text which the reader would normally not recognize. “Metatextuality” is the third type and deals with the critical relation of two texts or, as Genette puts it: “it unites a given text to another, of which it speaks without necessarily citing it (without summoning it), in fact sometimes without even naming it” (4). Genette’s fourth type of transtextuality is “architextuality” and as he claims, it is “the most abstract and most implicit of all” (4). By this he means everything that makes a literary text what it is or, in other words, “the literariness of literature” and “the entire set of general or transcendent categories” (1) (types of discourse, modes of enunciation, literary genres etc.). The last category Genette describes is “hypertextuality”. This has to do with the relationship between two texts by regarding one of them as “hypotext” (the prior text) and the other one as the “hypertext” (an adaptation) (5). Another term for “hypertext” would also be the “reading” of a source text, and the

different versions that emerge with different readings of the novel (see Stam 66). Although Genette focuses more on the field of literature his theory can be transferred to film and adaptation studies as well. Considering both, literature and film as a form of 'text', their relationship to each other can be analysed under the aspect of 'transtextuality'.

To summarize this section, we may say that transtextualiy is clearly important when looking at adaptations. As a number of theorists have argued, every text adapting a former text automatically functions on a level of transtextuality. Gérard Genette's five types will therefore serve to determine which transtextual relationships exist between the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and its filmic 'translations', considering the changes filmmakers and screenwriters have made to Oscar Wilde's work. Have they maintained the original title? If not, does that indicate that a large number of changes have been made to the original text? What transtextual references can be found in the films? All these questions will be included in the analysis of the films below. Because 'intertextuality' is only one of Genette's five types, I have decided to use the broader term 'transtextuality' in the analysis when describing the relationship between source text and films, as well as between films and other 'texts'<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> By 'texts' I not only refer to written texts but also to other films, magazine covers, songs etc. which have been used in film adaptations.

## 2. Screening *Dorian Gray*

Why *Dorian Gray*? And, if so, how? (Osborne 11)

A question we have to ask ourselves is: why should this paper concentrate on Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*? Ever since the novel was published, it has been a popular source for countless stage and film adaptations. Hardly a year passes by without a new *Dorian Gray* theatre production or film (see section 2.2). It can be argued that this is because Oscar Wilde and his work never seem to be out of fashion. As Elana Gomel argues, “[h]ardly any other writer has been the subject of so many biographies, novels, films and plays” (79). Richard A. Kaye asks:

[i]s there a Victorian writer who has won as much attention in the last few years, critical or popular, as Oscar Wilde? [...] Wilde, however, has broken down all barriers – generational, cultural, sexual – ruling everywhere and with everyone in new biographies, scholarly editions, collections of essays, updated editions of his letters, film adaptations, plays and exhibitions marking his centenary [...]. (347)

In addition, Jonathan Fryer claims that Oscar Wilde is “a strikingly modern figure” (1) since he “was not just an acclaimed writer, undoubtedly the finest comic dramatist of his age; he was also a celebrity. His self-promotion [...] was relentless. He knew how to generate publicity, [...] both through the newspapers and magazines of Victorian Britain through gossip” (1). This fact surely adds to the continuous popularity of his work.

Research for this thesis on film adaptations of *Dorian Gray* has led to the conclusion that only few sources are extensively dealing with filmic transformations of Wilde's novel, the most comprehensive of which is Robert Tannitch's *Oscar Wilde on Stage and Screen*, which was published in 1999. Tannitch does not only give an overview of Wilde's literary work but also lists its film and stage versions. However, he does not go into greater detail about the ways in which Wilde's work was transformed into movies. Apart from that, there are only a limited number film reviews and articles, most of which are devoted to the films by Albert Lewin (1945) and Glenn Jordan (1973). Papers on *Dorian Gray* films, in general, only discuss the most popular film versions or just summarize what has already been said (e.g. Kirsten von Hagen). Against this

background *Dorian Gray* appears to be an obvious choice for consideration in adaptation studies, to give an overview of how and when Wilde's work was adapted with regards to the theoretical concepts discussed in the previous sections.

Since in film adaptations it is not only the film that is important but also its source text, the next section will begin by taking a closer look at the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, offering a short overview of its plot, characters and structure. This will become relevant for analysing the corresponding aspects in the film versions. Following this there will be a section on the public reception by the novel at the time it was published, which will be important for the later analysis of the film adaptations when comparing the reception by the novel's Victorian readership to the reactions of cinema audiences in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. To conclude this section, there will be a summary of the main themes of the book, which reflect the integral meaning of the novel, again to lay the foundations for the comparison between novel and film, and of the films with each other.

## **2.1. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* – The Novel**

[...] *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is not only a remarkable achievement of its time, given all its faults, but the germinal story is an inspired one like, say, that of Jekyll and Hyde. The story itself is what sold out the issues of *Lippincott's* and intrigued its Victorian readers. It is a variation on the Mephistotelian bargain with the devil. (Osborne 12)

Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was first published on 20 June 1890 in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* (Kunz 255), pages 3-100, and appeared simultaneously in America and England (Maier 1). Reactions were more than negative: it was called "vulgar", "unclean", "poisonous" and "discreditable" (Flood 2011). Newspapers and reviewers criticised it as an immoral book that contained insinuations of homoerotic love and, to a wide extent, stories of drug abuse, seduction and murder. Dorian is presented as a narcissus who loves nothing more than his own picture, who is loved by men like Wotton and Hallward and who seduces young men of the Victorian aristocracy (Mayer 235). Such a story was unacceptable to Victorian readers. In his biography about Wilde,

Vyvyan Holland goes as far to claim that the true reason for the attacks on the novel actually lay in the fact that it revealed the “relentless hypocrisy” of Victorian society (69).

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* has also been regarded as 'autobiographical' at times. Elana Gomel states that “Wilde reputedly said that Dorian Gray was what he wanted to be, Lord Henry Wotton what people thought he was, and Basil Hallward what he was in reality” (85). Jerusha McCormack adds that “*Dorian Gray* became notorious as a [...] ‘fatal’ book: a book which was literally to prove ‘fatal’ to Wilde himself. [...] Wilde took *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as a script for his own life [...] and inscribed himself for ever in the fiction which he had already written” (114).

Wilde’s novel was published in two different versions, first in 1890, and then, including several revisions, it was republished by Ward, Lock & Co. at the end of April 1891 (Maier 1). Those editions can be treated as two separate books since they “vary considerably in size and structure, [and] were marketed to divergent readerships” (Bristow xii). The first version consists of thirteen chapters (Kohl, *Wilde* 124) and appeared in *Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine*, a periodical well known in the United States, which published separate U.S. and British editions (Bristow xiii). Barbara Belford calls this first ‘draft’ unplanned and improvised, with Wilde being fully aware of that (295). Without Wilde’s consent, Joseph Marshall Stoddards, who was in charge of Wilde’s publications at Lippincott’s and who made the suggestion that Oscar Wilde wrote a novella in the first place (Gillespie 49), decided to make changes to the first manuscript considering its “critical passages” (“kritische Passages”) (Kunz 255).

In the second version, which was also called *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, even more profound changes were made to the original text (255)<sup>8</sup>. Wilde added another six chapters (see Maier 3), a preface (Bristow xix), and included “numerous textual changes” (xxxi). Norbert Kohl argues that the novel was not only extended in terms of length; in his opinion the changes go beyond that:

The frequent substitution of the word ‘painter’ for the proper name, and the omission of various details from Hallward’s life, show that Wilde’s concern was to accentuate his status as an artist. Parallel to this shift of emphasis from the

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<sup>8</sup> As Peter Raby claims, Wilde decided to use the already revised *Lippincott’s* version as base for the second edition, rather than his original script (*Wilde*, 68).

private to the functional, there is a shift in the relationship between the painter and Dorian. In the original version, there was a passionate and erotic link between them, but now the stress falls on Basil's idealism, his sense of responsibility, and his good nature. Wilde accentuates the destructive side of Lord Henry – his irresponsibility and his cynicism and so sharpens the contrast between the two characters, hereby bringing out all the more clearly the moral alternatives that they represent. (Kohl, *Conformist* 142)

Likewise, Peter Raby argues that Wilde, in his second version, tried to reduce any instances of physical intimacy between Basil Howard and his model (e.g. Basil's admitting his fantasies about Dorian) (*Wilde* 68), and any scenes of intimate relationships between the characters in general (Maier 3). The elimination of homosexual passages throughout the book was for the most part motivated by the fact that Samuel Henry James, writer for the *St. James's Gazette*, threatened that Wilde would be persecuted by the British police if he identified himself with everything in the book. Furthermore, Wilde decided to remove some of the instances of the French language in the text and tried not to make his "narrator sound too didactic" (Bristow xxxv). Neither James Vane, Sybil's brother, nor Sybil's mother were part of the original version of *Dorian Gray* (Kunz 257). Joel Kaplan and Sheila Stowell regarded the character of James Vane as a "Wildean afterthought" and argued that his function was to "provide his story with a more obviously moral framework" (324). Beckson argues that despite of this 'moral framework', the changes made to the second version of the novel "did little to minimize the too obvious moral" (8). However, Wilde never wanted the book to have a moral story behind it. He wanted it to be neither moral nor immoral, since according to him, no such book exists: "[t]here is no such thing as a moral or immoral book. Books are well written or badly written. That is all" (DG 3). Oscar Wilde was of the opinion that morality should not stand in first place but always be second, since "*The Picture of Dorian Gray* was intended to show that 'all excess, as well as all renunciation, brings its punishment'" (Bristow xxxviii). In addition to that it was important to him to "have the ethical beauty of [his] story recognized" (Dowling 118), for he was convinced that it existed. In addition, Wilde argued that "whatever vices people detected in Dorian reflected the reader's own vices and not the author's" (Foldy 12).

Although Wilde thought that the longer edition of his novel would gain more

praise than the first, the later version attracted even more negative responses and sales were far from what was expected (Bristow lviii). The novel also included a preface that was reprinted with small revisions in the 1891 edition. Bristow argues that “[s]uch an uncompromising assertion attests to Wilde's unbending faith in the rhetorical efficacy of aphorism and his refusal to placate moralistic opposition” (lvii). Michael S. Foldy states that

Wilde's literary treatment in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* of sin and corruption, and of vice and crime, the whole of which was underlain by a sub-text which suggested (but did not explicitly articulate) homoerotic longings and activities, had the notoriety of creating a major literary sensation and sparking a heated public debate on art and morality that was waged for months afterwards in the press. (80)

In reaction to the attacks on his novel, Wilde wrote a series of letters to the editors of the *St. James's Gazette*, *Daily Chronicle* and the *Scots Observer*, also known as '*In Defence of Dorian Gray*'. He strongly objected to the line “Mr. Oscar Wilde's Latest Advertisement; A Bad Case” (Dowling 105) and especially to the term 'advertisement'. He wrote:

I am tired to death of being advertised. I feel no thrill when I see my name in a paper. The chronicler does not interest me anymore. I wrote this book entirely for my own pleasure, and it gave me very great pleasure to write it. Whether it becomes popular or not is a matter of absolute indifference to me. (105)

After Wilde's attempts to convince the critics of *Dorian Gray* of its artistic value failed he ceased to defend his works in public and refrained from reacting to any negative criticism in the public press (Maier 3). Nevertheless, Wilde's work has enjoyed great popularity until the present day and its fascination has not decreased with time.

### **2.1.1. Plot – Character Relationships – Structure**

Wilde's only novel tells the story of a wealthy young man called Dorian Gray who sells his soul in order to gain eternal youth and who wishes that his portrait shall grow old while he stays eternally young. Tempted by sin in all its forms Dorian turns his back on

innocence and purity and is slowly dragged into the darkest corners of the Victorian underworld, a place for sexual transgressions and opium addiction. Nine tenths of the plot take place in London, which is divided into the wealthy West with its luxurious houses of the upper class and the poor East (Kunz 266).

Apart from Dorian Gray, the two other main male characters are Basil Hallward, the painter, who displays a deep admiration and affection for Dorian's perfection, and Lord Henry Wotton, who turns Dorian's moral perception of the world upside down. While Basil tries to protect Dorian from Lord Henry's poisonous influence, Wotton questions everything Dorian says: "I present you with all the sins you never had the courage to commit" (DG 71). The major turning point in the plot of the novel is represented by the death of Sibyl Vane, an actress Dorian falls in love with and who kills herself after he rejects her. Until that point Dorian resists the temptation and Wotton's influence and remains innocent and pure at heart, but when Sibyl's dead body is found in the river, the changes in his character are beginning to appear in the painting. From then on he lives his life in any and every way he pleases, rejecting morals and social values. Instead of Dorian, his portrait painted by Basil Hallward ages and gradually reflects the signs of his immoral behaviour. However, the decisions he makes are not without consequences in the end, and the novel reaches its ultimate climax with Dorian destroying his own painting and therefore bringing about his own death.

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* depicts an interesting relationship between three men: Dorian Gray, Basil Hallward and Lord Henry Wotton. In view of this, one might say that Dorian's world is dominated by male characters. Terence Dawson argues that Basil and Henry are "two diametrically opposite 'types'": the "dull and conservative" painter versus the "idle aristocrat" with his "flamboyant personality and outrageous wit" (67).

Dorian's character is portrayed and reflected through Basil, who wants to preserve Dorian's exceptional beauty by painting him, and Wotton, who tries to interfere with what Dorian regards as right and wrong. Although Basil tries everything in order to save Dorian's innocence and fights Lord Henry's devastating influence, the portrait represents both Dorian's desire for eternal youth and his fear of age and decay. Without it, Dorian would not be able to live this life without showing his moral downfall in public.

Lord Henry Wotton, on the other hand, finds entertainment in the innocent young man and happily introduces him to the Victorian underworld – a decision he later regrets when he realizes what he has created. “Dorian Gray had been poisoned by a book and by a picture” (DG 128). “Lord Henry had given him the one, and Basil Hallward had painted the other” (Bristow xxxvii). Dorian Gray is drawn into the vicious circle of sin and crime ultimately leading to the murder of Basil Hallward out of mere loathing and hate for the man who once painted him. He is a “creature sullied by every form of debauchery and vice” (Bendz 60). The painting constantly reminds him of the evil deeds he committed in his life.

Sibyl Vane - as the only major female character - appears to be rather ‘flat’ in contrast to the other characters. Regina Gentz calls her a “femme fragile” (381). Hans Mayer argues that this is not at all because Wilde was unable to portray female characters. He states that Sibyl is a ‘character of art’ who is loved by Dorian for her art (as an actress) and not as a woman (239). Moreover with her innocence and purity she represents everything that is good (Gentz 383). Throughout the novel Dorian acts as a seducer of women rather as someone who is actually capable of falling in love. His life is dominated by the mere enjoyment of his immoral actions and their lack of consequences – at least, this is how it seems to him. However, the death of Sibyl Vane marks an important point in the novel. As Peter Raby argues, it is the “test which confirms Lord Henry’s domination over Dorian; [...] he instinctively chooses art rather than love, confirming the poisonous theories which he first heard from Lord Henry in Basil Hallward’s garden” (*Wilde* 72).

The novel is narrated from a third-person point of view although most of the time the reader experiences the story through Dorian's eyes and descriptions of his thoughts. With regard to structure it can be said that basically the novel consists of two parts: the first part ranges from chapters one to ten and covers the introduction of the characters, the painting and the story of Sibyl Vane. This is followed by chapter XI which condenses about eighteen years of Dorian’s life and does not include any dialogue. Overall, Kohl states that “[a]ltogether the novel covers some nineteen years, of which just six days are dramatized in the first ten chapters, and twelve [days] from chapter XII onwards”

(*Conformist* 146). In the second half of the novel the story revolves around James Vane's pursuit to take revenge for Sibyl's death, the murder of Basil Hallward and, finally, the destruction of the painting and consequently the death of Dorian Gray.

## 2.1.2. Themes and Motifs

### 2.1.2.1. Dandyism

Central to the novel is the theme of dandyism and Oscar Wilde himself was regarded as the embodiment of the perfect Victorian dandy. Stephen Calloway calls Wilde an "[a]esthetic [d]andy, [who] chose, as all great [d]andies must, to put only his talent into his work, but his genius into his life" (52). Rhonda K. Garelick describes dandyism as

a performance, the performance of a highly stylised, painstakingly constructed self, a social icon. The movement announced and glorified self-created, carefully controlled man, whose goal was to create and effect, bring about an event, or provoke reaction in others through the suppression of the natural. Artful manipulation of posture, social skill, manners, conversation, and dress were all accoutrements in the aestheticization of self central to dandyism. (3)

In the light of this definition two characters in Wilde's novel can be seen as representations of dandyism: Dorian Gray and Lord Henry Wotton (see Dawson). Ulrike Kunz further suggests that both characters can be seen as a "new dandy" (294). Both are financially independent, push common social boundaries and do not obey any moral principles and therefore move beyond the "prototype dandy" George Brummel. Terence Dawson calls Dorian the "Wildean dandy par excellence" (106) and he argues that "the Wildean dandy will do everything possible to avoid suffering" (107). Even more so, Günter Erbe describes Wotton as a "prominent dandy character" (12) ("markante Dandyfigur"), who feeds Dorian with his philosophy of superficial pleasures and who introduces him to the Victorian Underworld, opium dens, exclusive clubs and ladies and gentlemen of the Aristocracy. Wotton and Dorian also seem to reflect Christopher Lane's claim that the dandy derived pleasure from the "dissolution of [society's] boundaries" (29). But pushing the boundaries of society also leads to problems and dangers for the dandy. He is constantly fighting with his conscience and can either give in to his

temptations, like Dorian, or repress them, like Basil Hallward (see Roditi 151). The character of Dorian Gray takes the meaning of 'dandy' even further, as he shows how a dandy can turn into a criminal.

### 2.1.2.2. Aestheticism

Closely linked to the theme of the dandy is the theme of aestheticism. Gentz argues that “[t]he aesthete does not always present himself as a dandy, but the dandy is always a representation of aestheticism” (“[d]er Ästhet präsentiert sich nicht immer als Dandy, aber der Dandy ist immer eine Erscheinungsform des Ästheten”) (297).

In general, aesthetes followed the principles of Walter Pater who is the “foremost exponent of the aesthetic view on life” (Johnson, *Aestheticism* 3). In its most basic sense, aestheticism means “a devotion to beauty, and to beauty primarily as found in the arts” (*Aestheticism* 1). To pursue an aesthetic life, as Pater suggested it, one must “cultivate [one’s] whole area of awareness, sharpening intelligence, sense-perception and powers of introspection” (*Aestheticism* 19). Aestheticists search for beauty and delight in all things, despite always being limited by “puritan morality” (*Aestheticism* 34). Viewed in this way it becomes clear that in the novel, Lord Henry Wotton represents the perfect aesthete. Regina Gentz calls Wotton the “prototype of aestheticism” (“Prototyp des Ästhetizisten”) (266), since he acts as an embodiment of the aesthetic principles and values which fundamentally influence Dorian’s actions in the second half of the novel (266). However, Regina Gentz argues that Wotton refuses to take responsibility for his actions and therefore proves the difficulty of living according to aesthetic principles, at least not without acting “anti-social” (“unsozial”) (268).

But the novel cannot only be seen as an aesthetic work, it also criticises aestheticism (see Pfister 72 and 82) by using the voices of Basil or showing Dorian’s moral decline (82). Through Lord Henry, Dorian becomes “enslaved to an aesthetic and decadent way of life” (Kabel 145). Colin McGinn claims that what Dorian does is

to push aestheticism to its limits, making an art of his life, even its immoral aspects. He converts every facet of life, even death, into something aesthetic. Sin is merely an opportunity for artistic expression. Instead of requiring the work of art

to be subject to ethical evaluation, Dorian makes art superordinate over ethics, so that acts and events are judged by solely by their aesthetic qualities. (127)

The only escape from this ‘obsession with aestheticism’ comes through death in the end, by destroying his own portrait. McGinn adds that “[t]he fate of Dorian exemplifies his truth: his evil drives out his beauty [...] His fate becomes hideous from every viewpoint. The irony here could hardly be heavier” (140f). Dorian’s aestheticism finally leads to the ugliness of his soul.

#### **2.1.2.2.1. Colour Symbolism**

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* colours as well as the contrast between light and dark play an important role and is a technique linked to the theme of aestheticism. As a symbolist and aestheticist Oscar Wilde's uses a wide colour vocabulary to enrich detailed descriptions of appearances of characters and settings. For example: “honey-coloured blossoms” (DG 5), “coal-black hair” (DG 6). “rose-red youth” (DG 19), “apricot-coloured light of a summer day” (DG 42), “olive-green chrysoberyl that turns red by lamplight” (DG 119) or, “[h]er teeth showed like white seeds in a scarlet fruit” (DG 180). Neil Sammells claims that by Wilde’s colourful vocabulary, he adds to the “aestheticization of the Natural” (35) – the fascination with nature, the relationship between “Nature and Culture” and the “natural process of decay” (35).

The contrast between light and dark in the novel mostly refers to the change of atmosphere as the plot develops. Whereas in the beginning Dorian is described as pure and innocent, his character changes completely throughout the later chapters. Towards the end of the novel Dorian desires to “get back his light heart” (DG 123) (in this context ‘light’ can mean the opposite of ‘heavy’ but also of ‘dark’, meaning his ‘innocent’ heart) and he further refers to his painting in the following manner: “[s]uch hideous things were for the darkness, not the day” (DG 142). This shows how light and dark represent the change in Dorian’s character after he succumbs to debauchery and sins of every kind. In the same way Ans Kabel claims that “[i]n [*Dorian Gray*] there is also a change in atmosphere: the change from the light atmosphere of the beginning to a darker one at

the end” (146).

Especially the analysis of the film adaptation by Albert Lewin will demonstrate how the use of colour and the contrast between light and dark can be used on screen to invoke similar impressions as those suggested by the novel.

### 2.1.2.3. Hedonism

Be always searching for new sensations. Be afraid of nothing...A new Hedonism – that is what our century wants. You might be its visible symbol. With your personality there is nothing you could not do. The world belongs to you for a season... (DG 23)

According to Norbert Kohl, the “New Hedonism”, as advocated by Lord Henry in the passage above, is an “ethical alternative to puritanism. It is based on the Epicurean and Cyrenaic schools of philosophy, in which pleasure [...] is the only good in life” (*Conformist* 158). This philosophy is also closely related to the principle of aestheticism, namely deriving pleasure from aesthetic objects. The term hedonism goes back to Greek ‘hedone’ and means “joy, lust or pleasure” (Kunz 288). At its core, hedonism perceives pleasure not simply as the only good in life but it also sees *every* form of pleasure as good: “it makes no provision for ‘worthless pleasures’ or ‘overridden pleasures’, or any other pleasures that fail to have positive intrinsic value” (Feldman 27). Kohl argues, moreover, that the theories of hedonism and aestheticism that Henry introduces Dorian to are only a game for him, to see how far he can influence the pure and innocent young man (*Conformist* 157). Dorian, however, gradually loses himself in the search for new pleasures and takes the principles Henry taught him to perfection:

Yes: there was to be, as Lord Henry had prophesied, a new Hedonism that was to re-create life, and to save it from that harsh uncomely puritanism that is having, in our own day, its curious revival. It was to have its service of the intellect, certainly; yet, it was never to accept any theory or system that would involve the sacrifice of any mode of passionate experience. Its aim, indeed, was to be experience itself, and not the fruits of experience, sweet or bitter as they might be. Of the asceticism that deadens the senses, as of the vulgar profligacy that dulls them, it was to know nothing. (DG 115)

Dorian shapes his whole life according to the precepts of aestheticism and hedonism, rejects moral principles, seeks pleasure in immoral sensations, but the temptations to

which he succumbs are those that also destroy him in the end. Kunz further argues that through the death/suicide of Dorian at the end of the novel the concept of hedonism is not only put into question but also declared as failed, since Dorian wishes to be a better person again and to turn his back at senseless pleasures and debauchery (287).

#### 2.1.2.4. Narcissism – Youth and Beauty

The pulse of joy that beats in us at twenty becomes sluggish. Our limbs fail, our senses rot. We degenerate into hideous puppets, haunted by the memory of the passions of which we were too afraid, and the exquisite temptations we had not the courage to yield to. Youth! Youth! There is absolutely nothing in the world but youth! (DG 23)

In Oscar Wilde's novel, narcissism is intricately linked to the perception of youth and beauty. The plot resembles the story of Narcissus, who sees his reflection in the water and falls in love with it. However, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* the male protagonist does not fall in love with his reflection but with the image of youth and beauty in Basil Hallward's portrait of him. Ulrike Kunz calls the relationship between Dorian and his painting "auto-erotic" ("autoerotisch") and "deathly" ("todbringend") (303). It is only when Lord Henry reminds him of the transitoriness of his outer appearance that Dorian realizes that he will grow old while his picture will remain as it is now. According to Lord Henry "youth is the one thing worth having" (DG 22) and driven by the fear of losing it, Dorian wishes his painting to grow old while he remains as young and beautiful as shown in Basil's picture of him. This decision marks the beginning of his moral decline.

The themes of youth and beauty are also what make the novel so timeless. In 1973 John Osborne wrote in his introduction to the screenplay of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*:

But today? What are the things most valued, sought after? Beauty, yes; youth, most certainly. Youth has become, like death, almost a taboo subject. Everyone is not merely afraid of losing it but of even admitting that such a possibility exists [...] The lines of age on Dorian Gray's portrait are a very modern likeness in all this. Such a bargain with the Devil, which to Victorians seemed bizarre as well as wicked, in that they thought it thwarted nature or attempted to deny the Natural Order, is incipient in our world devoted to energizing, activating, promoting, jetting away. (13)

### 2.1.2.5. Good vs. Evil – The Beauty & the Beast and the ‘Doppelgänger’ Motif

Oscar Wilde did not only adapt the story of Narcissus and change it for the purpose of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* he also used the ‘doppelgänger’ motif in his only novel in its traditional sense. Kohl calls Dorian’s split personality a “paradoxical variation of the theme of the *doppelgänger*” (*Conformist* 152). The term was coined by Jean Paul in his 1796 novel *Siebenkäs* and describes a character who is

associated with evil and the demonic; thus one can infer that the Doppelgänger presents a notion of the subject/subjectivity that is defective, disjunct, split, threatening, spectral [...] an aberration, the stencil of a symptomatology of the self. (Vardoulakis 100)

One could also call the split personality an ‘alter ego’. In the context of *Dorian Gray* the ‘doppelgänger’ motif refers to the interaction between Dorian and his painting. By wishing his painting to grow old and to share the burden of his immoral behaviour, Dorian not only “gives up his ‘soul’” (Gomel 82), but also fractures his personality. Hence, these two personalities “act and react independently and yet are linked together in a fantastic manner; the one is physical, the other spiritual, and the link is the changing portrait” (Kohl, *Conformist* 152). The painting therefore becomes Dorian’s ‘doppelgänger’, a mirror of his actions, not only in the sense of his personality but also of his identity within society (Kunz 286), and while his appearance remains unharmed by debauchery and sin, the portrait turns into “the scene of his crime and of his morbid delight in his growing depravity, and in the future is to be the setting for his suicide and the re-establishment of his identity in death” (Kohl, *Conformist* 150). Another argument for viewing the painting as Dorian’s ‘doppelgänger’ is the fact that the painting exists for almost the whole length of the novel. It is created at the beginning simultaneously with the introduction of the main characters and is destroyed on the very last pages of the book (see Kafalenos 28). Gentz argues that since Dorian and the portrait are two parts of the same person the destruction of the one instantly leads to the death of the other (343). Ulrike Kunz adds that the portrait acts as part of his conscience (285). The painting no longer represents Dorian’s innocence, purity, beauty and youth, or as Raby calls it “a perfect image of his beauty” (*Wilde* 69). It serves as a constant reminder of his

rotten and poisoned soul, it is the embodiment of evil (Gentz 344) and shows that all action, whether moral or immoral, leaves its mark (Middeke 153).

This shift of meaning is similarly linked to the change of atmosphere from light to dark, mentioned in Section 2.1.2.2.a, and adds to the “notion of good and evil (Beauty and Beast)” (Kabel 139) in the novel. Dorian’s appearance remains ‘good’ and beautiful whereas his painting turns into an evil beast representing a mirror of his crimes.<sup>10</sup> Ans Kabel further stresses that the divergence of good and evil “is a fascinating phenomenon and creates suspense” (139).

### 2.1.2.6. Homosexuality

When writing about *Dorian Gray*, whether about the novel or its film adaptations, one must not forget that the book was also criticised by its Victorian readership for its immoral content and homosexual implications especially because Oscar Wilde himself was accused of having relationships with young men during the 1895 Queensberry trial (Gillespie 55). His novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, was used as evidence in the process against Oscar Wilde to prove his homosexuality (Pfister 7). Norbert Kohl states in his work *Oscar Wilde: Leben und Werk* that *Dorian Gray* was “the first great homoerotic novel of English literature” (“der erste große homoerotische Roman der englischen Literatur”) (131). Oscar Wilde was said to have had a homosexual friendship with a writer called John Gray, whose appearance closely resembles that of Dorian: blonde hair, bright eyes and a slim face (Kunz 315). Kunz also sees a connection between the relationships Dorian/Basil and Wilde/Gray; in both cases an older artist feels attracted to a younger, feminised Adonis.

As mentioned above, Wilde made changes to his first version that mostly concerned the relationship between Dorian and Basil Hallward, whose painting of the young dandy is clearly a symbol of his affection and devotion. Throughout the novel Dorian is clearly not only attracted to women but also to men, and Lord Henry even

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<sup>10</sup> In *Das Erzählerische Werk Oscar Wilde’s*, Regina Gentz calls this relationship between Dorian and his painting a “dualism of good and evil” (“Dualismus von Gut und Böse”) and adds that the portrait is a symbol of Dorian’s pact with the devil to remain young (338).

suggests introducing him to his young male friends. This can be seen as an indication of sexual attraction but it could also simply derive from Dorian's desire to seek pleasure following the principles of aestheticism and hedonism (see sections 3.3.3 and 3.3.4) and pushing the boundaries of society's notions of good and immoral behaviour. Furthermore, Dorian's relationship with Alan Campbell also has homosexual overtones.

The theme of homosexuality is noteworthy for the analysis of films because when *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was published it outraged Victorian society and was condemned as an immoral, poisonous work of literature. As will be discussed later in the analysis of film adaptations, this theme was viewed differently later.

## 2.2. Film Adaptations of *Dorian Gray*

Wilde's first and only full-length prose narrative is not only widely read, but is also one of those rather rare literary works that have inspired artists from other spheres [...] (Kohl 139)

These "other spheres" that Norbert Kohl mentions in *Oscar Wilde: Works of a Conformist Rebel*, refer to the fact that Wilde's novel has been turned into ballets, operas and: films. According to Robert Tanitch and the Internet Movie Database twenty-three adaptations of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* have made it to the big screen so far, the first screened as early as 1910. Wilde's novel has been turned into silent films, feature films and has been adapted for television. For the purpose of this thesis, and because a selection had to be made regarding the extent of this work, the analysis in Section 3 will focus on film adaptations after 1945. The 1945 adaptation by Albert Lewin, as stated below, marks not only the transition from Silent Films to talkie versions but it is also the first adaptation of *Dorian Gray* to include scenes in Technicolor. Lewin's adaptation will therefore be used as a starting point for the analysis.

Silent films based on Oscar Wilde's work will be summarized in the next section. Unfortunately not much information is available about these early adaptations apart from a few reviews and names of directors and cast, mainly because copies of most of the

films have been lost over the years<sup>11</sup>.

### 2.2.1. Silent Films and B/W Versions

Fascination with Wilde and the 1890s always had its forbidden side. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde's most famous story, epitomized for generations of readers and cinema audiences the atmosphere of evil and decadence, and sin. Given its participation in acts of looking and mirroring, the story understandably attracted the early film industry.  
(Sloan 171)

Manfred Pfister suggests that silent films benefited from the “visual and fantastic aspects” (“visuellen und phantastischen Aspekte”) in *Dorian Gray* (23). Between 1910 and 1918 six directors adapted *The Picture of Dorian Gray* for the screen. All versions were silent films and shot in Black and White. The earliest adaptation of Wilde's novel was a Danish film in 1910 called *Dorian Gray's Portræt* directed by Axel Strom (Tanitch 371). Strom's version was only twenty-three minutes (or twenty-four minutes according to Lene Østermark-Johansen [237]) long and starred Valdemar Psilander as Dorian Gray (Ramge 293). Østermark-Johansen argues that although reviewers criticized that the film did not “capture the eerie atmosphere of the novel”, they praised its actors for their “highly dramatic acting” (237).

An American version of Wilde's work by Philips Smalley with Wallace Reid in the leading male role (Tanitch 372) appeared in 1913, but it was not very well received. Swiss film critic Karl Bleibtreu in particular voiced heavy criticism - claiming the film failed to do justice to Wilde's novel and merely relied on its high profile to promote and carry the film. Bleibtreu states that the novel's “lack of action” (“Handlungslosigkeit”) makes it un-adaptable for the screen since the “beauty of the novel lies in its language” (“[da] die Schönheit des Werkes nur auf Sprache [...] beruht”) (qtd. in Bär 626). The adaptation of the novel was therefore unsatisfactory for its audience.

These films were followed by a Russian silent film in 1915 with the title of *Portret*

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<sup>11</sup> This has been not only the result of analysing existing literature dealing with silent film adaptations of *Dorian Gray* but also, for example, researching the catalogues of the British Film Institute in London, all of which referred to the fact that most silent films have been lost or destroyed. Besides it was not possible to obtain certain copies of Technicolor versions, neither with the help of the Austrian Film Archive, nor by contacting the agency which produced the film.

*Doriana Greya* by filmmaker Vsevolod Meierkhol'd (aka Meyerhold), who himself appeared in the role of Lord Henry Wotton. In this version Dorian Gray was played by a woman (a first), namely Varvara Yanova (Tanitch 373). Pfister claims that this version was the most outstanding of all silent films (23). Meierkhol'd wanted to transform the "entirely inadequate" approaches to the film medium at the time (Gianvito 40) and is therefore still regarded as one of the "twentieth century's foremost experimental theatre innovators"(40). With its "striking compositions, the dramatic lighting and the use of silhouette [...] many critics [felt] that had the film been released abroad when it was made it would have surpassed the reputation of Robert Wiene's *Das Kabinett des Dr Caligari* (1919)" (Tanitch 373). Philip Cavendish argues that this version of *Dorian Gray* has to be described as an "innovative adaptation" (225) because it was considered

a milestone in the sense that it constituted a sustained enquiry into cinematic self-definition at the point where the theatrical and the visual intersect. It is highly pertinent that the film subsequently became famous for its 'black and white masses' and its 'lines and contours' [...] In conventional terms, with its privileging of the visually static over the visually dynamic, *Portret the Doriana Greia* might be considered 'uncinematic'. (232)

Regrettably, despite being praised as an innovative piece of art for its "dramatic and expressive potential of light" (Cavendish 231), Meierkhol'd's adaptation has only survived in the form of production stills. Therefore Cavendish calls every analysis of it "speculative" (231).

In 1916 Fred W. Durrant directed a fourth, this time British, silent film production of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* with the same title. It is the only version of a *Dorian Gray* film that also includes an appearance of the devil<sup>12</sup> (Tanitch 373). A year later, in 1917, Richard Oswald adapted Wilde's novel for the German screen with Bernd Aldor in the role of Dorian Gray (374). The main feature of this film is that it consists of five acts. Early literary adaptations often imitated the structure of theatre plays, and thus filmmakers structured their films in the same way (Bär 626). The last *Dorian Gray* version that was produced during the silent film era was the 1918 Hungarian film with

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<sup>12</sup> However, the character of the devil/Satan also appears in theatre versions of the novel, as for example in the 1928 production of the Chanin's Baltimore Theatre, New York (Tanitch 374).

the title *Az Élet Királya*, starring Bela Lugosi as Lord Henry Wotton (Tanitch 374).

After 1918 a long gap followed before the next Dorian Gray films reached the cinemas and it was not until 1945 that Albert Lewin brought an American adaptation of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to the screen (the first talkie). Despite being an overall Black and White film, colour plays an important role in Lewin's adaptation. This aspect will be further analysed in the next chapter. Albert Lewin's version features George Sanders as Lord Henry Wotton, Angela Lansbury as Sybil Vane and Hurd Hatfield as Dorian Gray. Tanitch describes Hatfield's performance silent-film like with his "pallid, doleful, smooth, youthful, chiselled good looks [which] were so glacially cold, so immobile, [that] he might have been made of marble" (378). Hardly any other adaptation of Wilde's novel has gained as much praise. In the same year the film appeared it also won the Oscar for Best Cinematography in Black and White (Beuselink 100).

### **2.2.2. *Dorian* in Technicolor**

After 1945 and the success of Lewin's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde's novel underwent numerous adaptations, most of which were television adaptations and shot in colour. Especially between 1953 and 1961, three Dorian Gray films were made and all of them appeared on television: an American film in 1953, directed by Mort Abrahams, and in 1961, a British television film directed by Charles Jarrott (Tanitch 381), and another American film directed by Paul Bogart (382). Since these films 'only' appeared on television hardly any information is available concerning these adaptations apart from details of the cast.

The first major Technicolor film that reached the cinemas was Massimo Dallamano's 1969/70 West German/Italian film *Das Bildnis des Dorian Gray*, which was also known as (*The Secret of*) *Dorian Gray* and *Il Dio Chiamato Dorian*. It featured well-known German actors like Herbert Lom as Lord Henry or Helmut Berger as Dorian Gray. 1973 another version of *Dorian Gray* was brought to the screens in America by Dan Curtis Productions, this time under the direction of Glenn Jordan, and adapted by screenwriter John Tomerlin (Tanitch 387). It is mostly remembered for the performance

of Shane Briant in the role of Dorian Gray. Three years later, in 1976, John Osborne adapted Oscar Wilde's novel for British television. Directed by John Gorrie, it was mostly famous for John Gielgud's performance as Lord Henry Wotton, whereas the other leading actors, Jeremy Brett in the role of Basil Hallward and Peter Firth as Dorian Gray, remain in the background. This British adaptation was then followed by a French television film in 1977, directed by Pierre Boutron, called *Portrait de Dorian Gray*, and by an American version entitled *Take Off* in 1987.

With *The Sins of Dorian Gray* the first more radical adaptation of Oscar Wilde's novel reached American television audiences in 1983 (Tanitch 391). Tony Maylam directed the film, in which Dorian Gray was played by a woman (Belinda Bauer). An even more bizarre approach to Wilde's work was demonstrated by Ulrike Ottinger in 1984 with the West German film *Dorian Gray im Spiegel der Boulevardpresse/ The Mirror Image of Dorian Gray in the Yellow Press* (Tanitch 392). As in the previous 1983 version, Dorian's role is played by a woman, Veruschka von Lehndorff, who is described as "a 1960s androgynous-looking model" (Kuzniar 141), and close in appearance to Lewin's Dorian Gray, Hurd Hatfield.

After 1984, twenty years had to pass before a new adaptation of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* would be undertaken as a feature film. In the meantime the novel was the source for numerous theatre productions or musicals but no director chose to transform Wilde's story into a film, probably on account of the lack of success of former adaptations. The year 2004 saw a reversal of that tendency. Two directors dared to take Wilde's story to the screen: David Rosenbaum and Allen A. Goldstein. Both adaptations are rather radical approaches to Wilde's novel, but while Rosenbaum's film remains 'faithful' to the general story of *Dorian Gray*, Goldstein takes a different approach. He transposes the story to late-twentieth-century Manhattan and centres it around 'Louis', a rising star in the model business. Since then, only two more adaptations have followed: Duncan Roy's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in 2007, starring David Gallagher as Dorian Gray, and in 2009 Oliver Parker's *Dorian Gray*.

Overall it can be said that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* has been and always will remain a popular source for filmmakers due to its timeless content (i.e. the obsession

with youth and beauty and the rejection of moral integrity to achieve a goal). Manfred Pfister claimed in 1986 that none of the adaptations of *Dorian Gray* has ever reached the success of its literary parent (24), but is this really true? And can such a conclusion also be drawn with regard to the adaptations between 1986 and now?

### 3. Analysis

Whereas in the previous sections it was the intention to provide background knowledge and to define a theoretical framework, the following chapters will focus on the analysis of selected film adaptations of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

#### 3.1. Selection of Films

As previously stated, almost all silent film versions of *Dorian Gray* were lost or destroyed and only little information remains with regard to the transformation of Wilde's work for the screen. Therefore this thesis will concentrate on selected films produced after 1945, beginning with the first talkie version, namely Albert Lewin's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1945). In addition, the following eight films will be at the centre of this analysis:

*Das Bildnis des Dorian Gray* (1969), *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1973), *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1976), *The Sins of Dorian Gray* (1983), *Dorian Gray im Spiegel der Boulevardpresse* (1984), *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (2004), *Pact with the Devil* (2004) and finally the most recent adaptation *Dorian Gray* (2009). These films have been chosen according to relevance (in order to analyse the films following Cahir's translation modes) and their popularity among cinema/television audiences (judging by film reviews which were published upon release).

For the purposes of this analysis, the adaptations will be grouped together according to the manner in which the source novel is 'translated' (literal, traditional, radical). Further analysis continues by comparing the films to Wilde's novel, focussing on plot, characters, structure and themes. This comparison is based on the previously defined theoretical framework (fidelity, transtextuality). To conclude, the films of each section will be compared to each other before overall conclusions are drawn.

#### 3.2. Literal Translations

As mentioned above, the films for this analysis are grouped together according to their predominant 'translation mode'. These modes (literal, traditional, radical) have been

introduced in Section 1.3.3. and refer to the three ways of translating an original source (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*) into the 'language' of film. Literal translations, to begin with, are overall faithful translations, meaning that they "reconstitut[e] the film and all its attendant details as closely as possible to the letter of the literature" (*Approaches* 19). Further, Cahir states that

In a literal film translation, the filmmakers are duty-bound to follow the original story. Details of character, locale, and custom are recreated, sometimes painstakingly so, and brought to visual life. The movie stands as a facsimile, the best examples of which are memorable in their visual faithfulness to the letter of the text, at the expense, though, of the creative freedom and boldness of interpretation [...] (19)

Cahir argues that there are very positive as well as very negative aspects to a literal film translation. The strength of this translation mode lies within its fidelity towards the source text and that it "demonstrates a certain respect" (21) for the same. However, "[l]iteral translations do not lend themselves to exploration of the integral meaning of the parent text", which means that they do not entail radical interpretations. Therefore, the following three adaptations will show how directors managed to transfer *Dorian Gray* to the screen faithfully, while producing three films which are utterly different from each other. Despite the limited freedom of interpretation in a literal translation, filmmakers still manage to add their very own 'signature' to their adaptation of Oscar Wilde's novel.

### 3.2.1. The Picture of Dorian Gray (1945)

[...] *The Picture of Dorian Gray* has been the basis for several motion picture and television presentations. Only once was done justice to the novel. When Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer released *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in 1945, they released a timeless classic. (Beuselink, *Films in Review* 100)

Albert Lewin was the first director to bring a talkie film adaptation of Oscar Wilde's novel to the big screen. The predominantly black and white film features Hurd Hatfield in the role of Dorian Gray, George Sanders as Lord Henry Wotton and Lowell Gilmore as Basil Hallward. It was the first screen adaptation to deal with Wilde's literary classic in full-length format compared with the rather short Silent Films of earlier decades. However, Lewin's film was not completely shot in black and white. It included four scenes in

Technicolor, making up about three minutes of the 110 minute-long feature film (Wells-Lassagne 393). This is also the reason why this adaptation marks the transition from Black and White films to Technicolor versions of *Dorian Gray*.

George William Mank calls Lewin's adaptation "one of the most controversial horror films ever made" (294). Before the film was shot, Mank states, "MGM acquired the rights to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* for the sum of only about \$800", because of the "fallen glory of Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde" (298). The studio decided to invest over one million dollars into the production and despite its running "over schedule and over budget" (Mank 309) Lewin was given everything he needed to finish his film and his effort was rewarded in the end. Lewin's adaptation was praised as magnificent and a great contribution to the "art of motion pictures" (Mank 317). When the film reached the public reactions were shocking, but in a more than positive way. Mank states that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* "broke all first-week records" (318) and that it has "the distinction of having won the largest initial release audience of any MGM Horror film of the 1930s and 1940s" (319). Even long after its original release date, Lewin's version remains one of the "most popular MGM classics" (321), since the film provides

a hypnotic, civil, yet curiously depraved magic, fascinating to "the masses" in 1945, just as it fascinates so many today. The film's commercial achievements – its record-breaking early engagements, its surprising release grosses, the huge international success, the early (and popular) release of the film on video by MGM, its perennial status as one of the most-requested pictures in MGM's film library – all attest to this power. (Mank 322)

Furthermore, *Sight and Sound* magazine states that

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* isn't exactly in the category of mystery films, though why Hollywood should have made it at all is the year's best mystery. In the Yellow Nineties it was, no doubt, quite a shocker – but this is certainly a fine time to discover it. [...] Be that as it may, the film follows the book surprisingly closely [...]. (*Sight and Sound* 16)

It can be argued that Lewin's film remains one of the best-remembered *Dorian Gray* adaptations to date, not only for the memorable performance of its leading actors but also because of the faithful realization of Wilde's work, in terms of language and its main themes.

### 3.2.1.1. Story

“London-1886” (00:01:36) – An omniscient narrator tells the story of a young, beautiful man named Dorian Gray, who is the subject of the latest portrait by painter Basil Hallward. Basil’s friend, Lord Henry introduces the young Adonis to his views about youth and beauty and reminds him of the brevity of life. Enchanted by Henry’s words, and bewildered by the perfection of his portrait, Dorian makes a momentous wish: The picture should grow old while he always remains young, claiming that “It’s more than a painting. It’s part of myself” (00:12:50).

From this moment on, Henry’s words beckon Dorian into London’s underworld. Dorian falls for a young singer called “Sibyl Vane” performing *Little Yellow Bird* at a tavern called “The Two Turtles”. They both fall in love and only a short time later Dorian announces that he is “engaged to be married” (00:29:53), but after Sybil fails to pass a test to prove her innocence to Dorian, he leaves her and Sybil commits suicide. For the first time, Dorian notices a “touch of cruelty around the mouth [of the painting]” (00:41:24) and he realizes that the wish he had made back at Basil’s atelier came true. His moral decline begins.

Twenty years pass by in which Dorian lives a life of debauchery. Haunted by the immoral deeds he has done Dorian decides to marry Basil Hallward’s niece, Gladys, who has turned into a grown woman and who still believes in his innocence. As Basil threatens to reveal Dorian’s true nature to Gladys Dorian stabs him and decides to make her his wife and take her to Selby. However, he fails to flee his past and in a last effort to save his soul, he leaves Gladys and returns to London to investigate if the painting shows any signs of his good deed. Despite the horrible look on his portrait’s face he recognizes something good in the eyes of his painted self. Bolstered by this glimmer of hope, he decides to destroy the painting but when he literally stabs the portrait, he kills himself (01:42:44) and the painting is restored to its old form.

### 3.2.1.2. Characters and Structure

Overall, Albert Lewin chose to follow Wilde's novel closely. Frank M. Magill claims that Lewin's "*The Picture of Dorian Gray* is much closer to its source material in narrative structure than most films" (368). A reason for this, he states, is the fact that Oscar Wilde's novel is "only novella length" and that it "required less condensing than typical adaptations of longer fiction" (368). In his film, Lewin uses many of Wilde's original phrases and dialogues. Most conversations are, apart from a few insertions, identical with the source text, which shows that Lewin tried to stay as faithful as possible to the novel. This view is supported by Turner, who states that "Lewin wrote the script himself [and] followed Wilde's book faithfully in most respects" (*American Cinematographer* 87). This adaptation can predominantly be seen as a literal translation, although it also includes traditional elements, for example, by adding characters that did not appear in the novel.

Lewin made minor changes to the source text, probably to make the story work better for the medium of film. For example, he chose to turn Sybil Vane from an actress in the novel, to a bar-singer at "The Two Turtles" (00:13:36) in the film. While in the book Dorian falls for Sybil's representation of art and aestheticism, this time it is Sybil's beauty and singing of *Little Yellow Bird* that enchant him. Further, Lewin decided to change the circumstances under which Dorian breaks up with Sybil, and the events that lead to her death in the end. In the novel Dorian leaves her after she fails to be a good actress. In Lewin's adaptation, however, the unfortunate series of events is triggered by Lord Henry, who proposes that Dorian puts Sybil to a test: he should ask her to come to his house and stay the night. If Sybil is as good as Dorian claims, she will reject the offer, but overwhelmed by her feelings she decides to give into Dorian. Since she fails to pass the test, she is no longer "sacred" (00:32:29) to Dorian, and he leaves her. Lord Henry's 'test' is also a way to demonstrate Henry's growing influence over Dorian.

Albert Lewin also decided to add a new character to the story, namely Gladys, Basil's niece, who serves as an ideal way to show how much time has passed. While she grows into a lady, Dorian still looks a young man. Her character can be seen as an

adaptation of Wilde's Hetty Merton, the girl Dorian Gray spared at the end of the novel to redeem his soul. Additionally, Gladys not only levels out the balance between male and female characters in the film but also adds a romantic theme to the adaptation in order to make the film accessible for a wider audience.

Considering the film's structure it can be said that Lewin stayed faithful to Wilde's chronology. The story of the film is set in London and begins in 1886 (00:01:36). The events of the film then take place over a time period of more than twenty years. Albert Lewin also decided to use the voice-over of an omniscient narrator<sup>13</sup> who tells the audience not only about the characters but also about their feelings, almost like an inner monologue:

Lord Henry Wotton had set himself early in life to the serious study of the great aristocratic art of doing absolutely nothing. He lived only for pleasure. (PODG 1945, 00:01:55-00:02:04)

This creates a sense of immediacy and the audience is able to relate more easily and understand the characters' actions. George E. Turner calls this narrative technique "unusual" and claims that Lewin used it to "capture the style of the book, which is told in the first person by a character, who also becomes involved in the action" (*American Cinematographer* 87).

### 3.2.1.3. Themes and Motifs

Lewin's adaptation is especially interesting for its use of the contrast between light and dark. Additionally, the film was unique for its use of colour in a mainly black-and-white movie. As mentioned previously, this colour symbolism also plays an important role in the original novel. Albert Lewin decided to 'translate' Wilde's colour allegories for the purpose of film by visualizing them. The director uses a sharp contrast between light and dark on the one hand, to show the contrast between the 'two halves' of London, the rich upper class and the filthy bars of the London underworld on the other hand. While the scenes set in the houses of the upper class usually take place in a well-lit setting during

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<sup>13</sup> George William Mank claims that the voice-over was a "major feature" of the film, mainly because it was Sir Cedric Hardwicke, who spoke the narration (302).

the day, the scenes in which Dorian enters the working-class world are dark, mostly at night. This also adds to the audience's notion of good and bad in the film. Another way in which Lewin made use of the light and dark contrast is, for example, during the scenes in Dorian's playroom. The swinging lamp, after Dorian kills Basil or after he kills himself, creates a sharp contrast between light and shadow, highly dramatising the action. A further example of the usage of light/dark discrepancy is found in the lighting of characters. Lewin uses bright light and shadows to 'frame' the character's faces and silhouettes in order to make scenes more dramatic.

In the film, an element of horror is added by the portrait of Dorian Gray. The painting is shown in colour three times throughout the movie: right at the beginning when Dorian sees his portrait for the first time, when he shows it to Basil and in the end, when the painting is restored to its original state. The instances of colour put a special focus on the painting and are meant to create moments of surprise. The audience of a 1945 Black and White film most certainly did not expect colour scenes; these scenes were therefore especially outstanding.

Apart from the painting, Lewin also used Wilde's colour symbolism in a different way. For example, Dorian wears a white rose during the first scenes in the film, and it also appears on the painting. The white rose represents Dorian's innocence and purity which he loses after the death of Sybil Vane. When he learns that Sybil has killed herself the rose is no longer part of his dress. Furthermore, female characters like Sybil or Gladys are often dressed in light colours and special lighting techniques are used to make their faces appear illuminated. This adds to the notion of their purity.

#### **3.2.1.4. Symbolism<sup>14</sup>**

The film by Lewin was intentionally using a wide range of symbols, or "metaphysical touches", as Mank calls it (306). These symbols include, for example, a butterfly that is trapped in formaldehyde by Lord Henry as Dorian stares at his picture. Mank calls this

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<sup>14</sup> The first two films analysed here (1945 and 1973) include a remarkable number of symbols compared to the other films below which is the reason why I have decided to include an extra chapter on 'symbolism' for these two films.

an almost “baroque symbolism” (304). Just as Lord Henry preserves the butterfly’s beauty by killing it and pinning it down, Dorian wishes to preserve his youth and beauty by wishing the aging process upon his portrait. The fragile butterfly could also represent Dorian’s innocence that goes into decline after his wish is uttered out loud.

A “key symbol”, as Turner calls it, is the statue of an Egyptian cat, a goddess called “Sohkmet” (*American Cinematographer* 88), who has the “legendary power to grant wishes” (Magill 369). The statue does not appear in Wilde’s novel yet Lewin decided to add it to the movie, maybe to create a ‘magical’ or ‘mystic’ component. The statue is part of the portrait that Basil paints of Dorian and is sent together with the painting to Dorian’s house. As Lord Henry claims, “I don’t think the god and the picture should be separated” (00:13:00). In the film it is by the powers of the cat statue that Dorian’s wish is granted and the so-called ‘pact with the devil’ is made. In the further course of the film, the cat remains at the centre of attention. Throughout the film the cat statue “sits omnisciently in the center of the scene, as if eying the action”, Mank argues (307-308). It is present during several key scenes by sitting on the table in Dorian’s house, representing the haunting consequences of Dorian’s actions: it stares at Sibyl when she gets dressed to leave (00:34:17), it stands next to Dorian as he seduces Sibyl (00:34:48), it is in the centre of the frame as Dorian recognizes the change in the portrait for the first time (00:42:23), further, when Dorian tells Basil that he won’t let him see the painting (00:52:50), or for instance as Dorian reads out the lines by Omar Khayyám to Allen Campbell (01:16:48), before he tries to persuade him to get rid of Basil’s corpse. Even at the very end, the book *The Rubáiyát* leans against the statue of the Egyptian cat (01:44:41), mirroring the very beginning of the film.

Other symbols include for example Dorian knocking over a toy knight, which symbolizes Dorian’s moral downfall, therefore turning him into a “fallen knight” (Mank 309). Dorian is no longer the innocent ‘Sir Tristan’. In the end, before Dorian stabs the painting, he picks up the figure of the knight and puts it on the table. It serves as a symbol of Dorian trying to restore his soul; he does not want to be a ‘fallen knight’ any longer and is hopeful that he can change into someone better at last. The blocks that lie on the floor of his old playroom in which he hides the portrait also bear a symbolic

meaning. Throughout the course of the film, further blocks are added to the pile, beginning with a block with the initial 'D', for Dorian and two little blocks that read 'S' and 'V', for Sybil Vane. Mank claims that the block with the number '8' on it stands for 'portrait' as there are eight letters in the word (309). Later in the film, blocks are added for Basil Hallward, Allen Campbell, Gladys, and even Albert Lewin's initials are shown in the end (the director's 'signature'). These blocks represent all the characters of the film, the portrait and the filmmaker himself, and are added to the pile in the order of their appearance/death.

### 3.2.1.5. Transtextuality

In Lewin's adaptation transtextuality is mainly created through frequent quotation of original phrases and conversations from Oscar Wilde's novel. The characters' conversations, even the voice-over, are constructed through slightly altered words from the source text, making the relationship between hypo- and hypertext obvious to the audience. For instance, the scene in which Dorian makes his wish is almost identical with the corresponding scene in the book (DG 26):

If only the picture could change and I could be always what I am now. For that I would give everything. Yes, there's nothing in the whole world I would not give. I'd give my soul for that. (00:13:06-00:13:14)

It is due to Lewin's passion to authenticate Wilde's original words that he remained as faithful to the novel as possible. But Lewin even goes beyond adapting Wilde's novel. He also creates a transtextual level by using other works by Oscar Wilde for his screenplay, for example the poem *The Sphinx* from 1894<sup>15</sup>, which Dorian recites as he asks Sybil to spend the night at his house:

Dawn follows Dawn and Nights grow old and  
all the while this curious cat  
Lies couching on the Chinese mat with eyes of  
satin rimmed with gold.

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<sup>15</sup> Actually Dorian could not have read out Wilde's poem, since the film is set in 1886 and the poem was not published until 1894.

Hideous animal, get hence!  
 You wake me in each bestial sense.  
 You make me what I would not be.  
 You make my creed a barren sham.  
 You wake foul dreams of sensual life.  
 (PODG 1945, 00:34:39)

The sphinx in the poem represents a sensual and promiscuous creature, indicating that Dorian tries to seduce the innocent Sybil Vane and to put her chastity to a test. Another example for Lewin's use of transtextuality is the quotation from *The Rubáiyát* by Omar Khayyám which appears at the beginning and at the end of the film:

I sent my Soul through the Invisible,  
 Some letter of that after-life to spell:  
 And by and by my Soul returned to me,  
 And answered, 'I Myself am Heav'n and Hell'.  
 (PODG 1945, 00:01:24-00:01:35)

This reference was most likely made to direct the audience to the soul and the fact that Dorian says that he would "give his soul" in return for eternal youth. He uses it at the beginning and the end of the film in order to come full circle with regard to Dorian's fate. Further examples for transtextuality are the mentioning of Lord Henry reading *Les Fleurs du Mal* by Charles Baudelaire, Dorian praying *The Lord's Prayer* and the song Sybil sings at the tavern. *Little Yellow Bird* refers to the song *Goodbye, Little Yellow Bird*, which was written by Clarence Wainwright Murphy in 1903, and is not only sung by Sybil Vane but also by Gladys Hallward in the film:

The snow was very plentiful  
 And crumbs were very few  
 When a weather-beaten sparrow to a mansion window flew  
 Her eye fell on a golden cage  
 A sweet love song she heard  
 Sung by a pet canary there  
 A handsome yellow bird  
 He said to her, "Miss Sparrow, I've been struck by cupid's arrow.  
 Will you share my cage with me?"  
 She looked up at his castle  
 With its ribbon and its tassel  
 And in plaintiff tones said she:  
 "Goodbye, little yellow bird,  
 I'd rather brave the cold

On a leafless tree,  
 Than a prisoner be,  
 In a cage of gold.”  
 (PODG 1945, 00:14:44-00:15:56)

### 3.2.2. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1973)

In 1973, director Glenn Jordan and screenwriter John Tomerlin adapted *Dorian Gray* for American television. Produced by Dan Curtis, who is also famous for his horror film productions of, for example, *Frankenstein*, *Jekyll and Hyde* and *Dark Shadows*, the film was aired on 23 April 1973 as a part of the BBC's *Wide World Mystery* series (Thompson 98). The leading role was given to Shane Briant, a young actor who had been nominated “Best Newcomer” by London theatre critics in 1971 (see [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)). The film starred Nigel Davenport as Sir Harry<sup>16</sup> Wotton and Charles Aidman as Basil Hallward. Jeff Thompson claims that not only is Shane Briant's performance as Dorian Gray one of the most remembered portrayals, but the adaptation also gained praise because it stayed so close to the source text (99). Thompson goes as far as to claim in 2009 that Glenn Jordan's film is the “most faithful adaptation of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* ever filmed” (99). Concerning its success Thompson further states that

this *Dorian Gray* is considered one of the two best adaptations of the more than 30 treatments filmed since at least 1910. Although everyone from Wallace Reid (1913) to Jeremy Brett (TV-1961) to Helmut Berger (1970) to Belinda Bauer (TV-1983) to Stuart Townsend (2003) has played Dorian Gray, the two most widely remembered portrayals are those by Hurd Hatfield in Albert Lewin's 1945 MGM feature and Shane Briant in Curtis's 1973 telefilm. (98-99)

#### 3.2.2.1. Story

Set in London, in 1891, the film centres around three men: the painter Basil Hallward, Sir Harry Wotton and a young man called Dorian Gray. Dorian, who is yet innocent and

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<sup>16</sup> In this film, Oscar Wilde's Lord Henry is called Sir Harry Wotton. Therefore, in this analysis, I will also use the name as stated in the film.

inexperienced, poses for Basil, while Harry elaborates on his worldly wisdoms about life and pleasure. He urges Dorian to cherish his youth and to search for his own true nature. Entranced by Harry's words and fascinated by his own portrait Dorian wishes for eternal youth in exchange for his soul. Shortly afterwards, Dorian meets Sybil Vane, a barmaid and soon-to-be actress and they both fall immediately in love with each other. Dorian calls her his "angel" and "princess" (00:20:50) and claims that she is the "greatest romance of his life" (00:20:23). Henry suggests Dorian put Sybil to a test; to ask her to come to his house to stay the night. When she fails the test, Dorian leaves her. Incapable of dealing with the loss of her Prince Charming, Sybil drowns herself. Dorian realizes that he is responsible for her death and as he observes the changes in his portrait it becomes clear to him that the wish he made is coming true. For every crime and sin that he commits, the painting would show the signs of evil and debauchery while he would remain unblemished. From this moment Dorian sinks deeper and deeper into London's underworld.

Twenty years pass ("London 1911" [01:03:25]) and Harry has grown old and grey but Dorian still looks the same as before. For the first time after twenty years, Dorian sees Beatrice, Basil's niece, again. Still infatuated with Dorian she calls him "Saint John", "Sir Lancelot" and refers to him as "Prince Charming" (01:17:38). Dorian decides to propose to Beatrice and to seal the room with the painting forever. He is convinced that he can escape the portrait with the help of Beatrice's love. Just before he and Beatrice are about to leave England and leave the past behind Dorian desires to take one last look at his portrait, wondering whether Beatrice's love has left any marks on the painting. But the portrait looks even fouler than it did before and Dorian realizes that he had only married Beatrice to save himself, not because he loved her. Dorian grabs a knife and stabs the painting. The last scene shows a skeletonised hand with the red ring on it, indicating that the corpse on the floor is Dorian, while the painting has returned to its former state.

### 3.2.2.2. Characters and Structure

This adaptation of *Dorian Gray* is regarded as “an adaptation of Oscar Wilde’s novel and a remake of Albert Lewin’s film” (von Hagen 114). Therefore, apart from the relationship with its literary parent, it shows certain similarities in plot and structure with Lewin’s version. For example, the film uses a narrative voice-over, this time, however, serving as an interior monologue of Dorian Gray himself, who narrates the story from his perspective. The voice-over also serves to describe the characters:

The face of Sir Harry Wotton: rich, idle, bored with life. A man, who, to use his own words, knew the price of everything, the value of nothing.  
(PODG 1973, 00:01:08-00:01:22)

And further:

The face of Basil Hallward: a kind and generous man. A superb painter. As good a friend as I ever knew. So many faces to read the future in. Their futures and my own. (PODG 1973, 00:01:24-00:01:42)

Equal to Albert Lewin’s film, Glenn Jordan’s version makes use of an additional female character, this time called Beatrice, who grows older throughout the film to reflect the time that has passed and who later goes on to marry Dorian. In contrast to Lewin’s version, however, Dorian does not leave her in the end to protect her and his own soul, but he only marries her for her innocence. Glenn Jordan’s Dorian is therefore much more selfish and does not try and redeem his soul in the end:

[The portrait] knew I had only married Beatrice to escape, of course! I didn’t love her. I didn’t love anything. How could I as long as this foul thing existed. So long as it knew every secret corner of my heart and of my brain. It would haunt me wherever I went, whatever I did. Until it destroyed me, or I destroyed it.  
(PODG 1973, 01:47:43-01:48:14)

Apart from taking over Lewin’s changes for his adaptation of Wilde’s novel, Glenn Jordan maintained the overall structure and plot of the novel.

In this version the relationship between Dorian, Basil and Harry is clearly defined. On the one side, there is Basil. From the very beginning he is described as “kind” and acts as the complete opposite of Harry. The painter functions as a contrasting plot device to the hedonist gentleman. As a good and balanced character he tries to remind

Dorian of what is wrong or right throughout the film, and serves as his conscience, which Dorian rejects. Harry, on the other side, is rather dominant. He seeks his way into Dorian's mind, seducing him with words to live his life to the full, to give in to his temptations, according to the principles of hedonism:

The gods have been good to you. They've given you youth and beauty. The only things worth having. The world belongs to you for a season. Unhappily what the gods give they quickly take away. You have only a few years in which to live fully and completely. And when youth is gone you'll find that you have no triumphs left. Time is jealous of you. Time will have its revenge.  
(PODG 1973, 00:11:18-00:11:51)

Harry seems to be acutely aware of Dorian's sins in the film. The subtle tone in his voice towards the end of the film indicates that he knows the darkest recesses of Dorian's mind and heart:

Ah Dorian, how happy you are. What an exquisite life you've had. How glad I am that you've never created anything. You've never carved a statue or painted a picture. Live has been your art. You drank deeply of everything, nothing has been hidden from you. And yet you are still the same. Still quite flawless...  
(PODG 1973, 01:44:42-01:45:11)

The role of Sybil Vane has been slightly altered for the screenplay. While in the novel, Dorian rejects the young actress for her sudden lack of artistic credibility, in the film he ignores her after she yielded to him physically, as in Lewin's version. What is more, Sibyl dies through swallowing something by accident in the novel but dies by drowning herself in the river in Jordan's film. The fact that she drowns herself could be linked to Harry's words in the novel, when he is talking about Hetty, "[...] how do you know that Hetty isn't floating at the present moment in some star-lit mill-pond, with lovely water-lilies round her, like Ophelia?" (DG 183). Therefore, this links Sybil more to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* than to *Romeo and Juliet*, as mentioned in the novel<sup>17</sup>. Also, it can be said that Sybil and her death do not play as prominent a role as in the novel or in Lewin's version, since Dorian already gives in to debauchery before she dies, while in the novel it is Sybil's death that ultimately triggers Dorian's moral decline.

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<sup>17</sup> In the novel, Sybil kills herself by swallowing something, indicating that she poisoned herself like Shakespeare's Juliet.

Another alteration to the original was made concerning the character of Sybil's brother, James Vane. In the novel, as in Lewin's version, he is present throughout the scenes during which Dorian and Sybil fall in love. In Glenn Jordan's version, however, he only returns to London later in the film to take revenge on the man who killed his sister. But this was not the only change made to the script. Unlike the novel, James Vane comes to Dorian's house and tries to blackmail him into giving him one thousand pounds. While in the novel he accidentally dies during a hunting scene, in the film Dorian stabs him with a knife as he enters the nursery and finds the gruesome painting. In addition, Dorian calls Allen Campbell to his house to get rid of James Vane's corpse; in the book, by contrast, it is Basil Hallward's dead body.

### 3.2.2.3. Themes and Motifs

While Lewin's adaptation is to a great extent concerned with the matter of the soul, its decay and ultimate redemption, Glenn Jordan's version focuses on the theme of destiny. This is already represented in the opening lines in which the main character, Dorian, is thinking about who can be held responsible for people's futures:

A man's destiny, some say, is written in the stars. All he'll ever do. All he'll ever love. All he'll ever be. The whole of his life is inscribed in the heavens, some say. Others claim to see the truth in other places: In a deck of cards, the palm of a hand, a crystal ball, or the bottom of a cup. Perhaps it's in all of those. Perhaps none of them. For my part, the only glimpses of the future fate ever provided were in men's faces. There I've read passion, greed, hatred, envy...  
(PODG 1973, 00:00:03-00:00:52)

In the film, Dorian blames Basil for his moral decline since he created the portrait and fails to see that it is his own actions which bring about his future.

Have you any idea what my life has been since you painted that foul thing? See how it mocks me. How it reproaches me. The sight turns me sick. Even locked away in this room it haunts me. I know it watches me. It knows what I've done. What I'm doing. And its vile features alter with every sin I commit, every pain I inflict. It even knows my plans. I've seen it change in response to deeds not yet done. It knows! (PODG 1973, 00:58:36-00:59:17)

Even at the very end of the film, Dorian is still wondering who he can blame for what has

become of him:

A man's destiny, they say, is written in the stars. All he'll ever do. All he'll ever love. All he'll ever be. And once written they say, it can never be changed. If this be true, as I now suppose it must, then one question remains: Who does the writing? If I knew the answer to that, if I could be sure, then I wouldn't know whether to curse god for what my life has been, or praise the devil.  
(01:49:18-01:49:57)

Furthermore, the link between Dorian and his 'doppelgänger' is much more obvious than in Lewin's adaptation. From the very beginning onwards, Dorian seems to be drawn to the painting, a fascination that makes him wish to always stay as perfect as his picture:

How sad it is. I shall grow old but this picture will remain always young. My hair will turn grey, my skin will wrinkle, my teeth will rot, while my picture remains exactly as it is now [...] If only it were the other way round. If it were I, who would remain always young and the picture would grow old. For that I would give everything. Yes. Everything. [...] For that I would give my soul.  
(00:12:56-00:13:44)

Throughout the film, his urge to see the changes whenever he does something evil grows and the obsession with his other self become very prominent. It is almost as if he enjoys knowing what evil is hidden in the attic of his house. He also keeps a diary in which he writes every immoral deed that he commits, connecting his physical self with his 'other self' of the painting. Even at the very end, desperate to recognize some positive change in his portrait, he cannot resist looking at it one last time.

Thompson claims that this version of *Dorian Gray* "offers a more expansive depiction of Dorian's scandalous activities" (99). As has also been above, Dorian is visiting opium dens, paying a mother to let him have sex with her daughter, pushing Sybil into sleeping with him and generally flirting with various women – and men. The latter is especially interesting since previous versions did not show any homosexual scenes and while the novel could be read that way, it never obviously mentioned it. In the 1973 version we see Dorian exchanging looks with various men, and men are shown leaving his room in the middle of the night. Although the audience does not witness any explicit scenes, Dorian's voice-over adds to the impression that he has homosexual relationships: "Of course I was aware that my actions were less than

perfect. But after all they differed little from my contemporaries” (00:47:37). A further emphasis on Dorian’s homosexuality is made by his relationship with Allen Campbell, which Thompson calls “overtly homosexual” (99). Thompson argues that the scene in which Dorian asks Allen to get rid of James Vane’s corpse is far more intimate in the film than in Lewin’s version or the novel, especially since they are both in Dorian’s bedroom, with Dorian “[c]allously lounging in his bed” (99). Shane Briant, who plays Dorian Gray, claims that the changes made to the original story concerning Dorian’s debauchery were devised to make the audience consider his actions as immoral, since Wilde’s original story was less likely to shock an audience in 1973 (see Shinnick 49).

#### **3.2.2.4. Symbolism**

In this adaptation symbolism does not play as important a role as it did in Lewin’s version of Wilde’s novel. Glenn Jordan does, however, make use of colour symbolism, as it is also important to Wilde’s work. One example for that would be the appearances of Sybil and Beatrice: they both symbolize innocence and purity and are therefore dressed in light colours, like white or light blue. Most other characters throughout the film are predominantly dressed in dark clothes. Glenn Jordan therefore also makes use of the light-dark discrepancy, which is central to Wilde’s work. Another example of colour symbolism would be the purple ring that we see in the very first scene. It is also mentioned in the novel and belongs to Dorian. At the end of the film it helps the audience identify the corpse on the ground as Dorian’s dead body. Kirsten von Hagen claims that the colour red is “a symbol for Dorian’s decadence and debauchery” and therefore “ingeniously takes up the symbolism of the novel” (114).

Furthermore the film frequently uses statues of cupids as symbols for love, in this case physical love, for instance, after Dorian has seduced Sybil (00:30:10), at Harry’s party when Dorian has sex with an unknown woman (00:34:11) or the cupids on Dorian’s bedposts while he talks to Allen Campbell (01:39:32). They indicate sexual tension between Dorian and other characters and are used to ‘show’ the audience what happens off screen.

### 3.2.2.5. Transtextuality

Glenn Jordan's film is said to be the "most faithful adaptation of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* ever filmed" (Thompson 99). One reason for this opinion is that the script for the 1973 adaptation "retains many of Lord Henry Wotton and Dorian Gray's aphorisms about beauty, love, marriage, and temptation" (99). In fact, the film stays very true to the original plotline of the novel and frequently uses Wilde's original phrases throughout the film. Besides, the film also uses a quote from Oscar Wilde's Preface to *Dorian Gray* (3), "[t]hose who go beneath the surface, do so at their peril..." (PODG 1973, 00:06:13). The quotation is shown during the scene in which the portrait is presented to the audience for the first time, already indicating that the painting holds a deeper meaning. This transtextual reference links the film even closer to its source text but also intensifies the moral dimension of the film. Not only could it refer to the film itself and Dorian's moral decay, by going deeper beneath the surface of life, it could also address the audience: anyone reading a deeper meaning into the film would do so at his/her own responsibility. Taking this into consideration, Kirsten von Hagen suggests that through this quote, "[t]he book, which is neither moral nor immoral, because there are only books that are well or badly written, is turned into a film with a deeply moral ending" (114). Interesting is also, that Glenn Jordan decided to set his film in the same year as the revised edition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was published, namely 1891 (PODG 1973, 00:06:29). This reference can also be understood as a transtextual reference between Jordan's adaptation and the novel.

As mentioned earlier, Jordan based his film not only on Oscar Wilde's novel but also on the previous adaptation by Albert Lewin. He uses Lewin's idea to invent an additional character, Beatrice, in order to clarify for the audience how much time has passed and to add a more romantic tone to the film. Besides, he adapted 'Lord Henry's test' (see Albert Lewin's adaptation), through which Dorian tries to see Sybil's true character and which leads to their break-up. Therefore, both 'texts' serve as hypotext. In this regard, Lewin's film can not only be understood as an adaptation but also as a second source text for Glenn Jordan's adaptation.

### 3.2.3. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1976)

John Osborne's adaptation reached British television audiences on 19 September 1976 as a part of the BBC series *Play of the Month*. Reactions to the film were overwhelmingly positive, mainly caused by the outstanding performance of Sir John Gielgud as Lord Henry Wotton. Ronald Higham<sup>18</sup> claims that his portrayal of the Wildean dandy was "a great performance in the grand manner", that the "aphorisms were spoken with a smooth suave elegance of tone and apparent spontaneity that fitted well into the atmosphere of luxurious decadence" and that his looks resembled that of "an elderly satyr, a masterpiece of make-up and carefully contrived despair". James Murray adds in his review that John Gielgud "creates what is likely to become an immortal piece of television" and that he "dominates the screen picking up Wilde's verbal fireworks". Besides, he says that Gielgud "creates what is likely to become an immortal piece of television" and that he acted with "magnificent skill". The other actors, Peter Firth as Dorian Gray and Jeremy Brett as Basil Hallward, however, are hardly mentioned by the press. Nicholas de Jongh claims that "Mr Firth, with a huge gift for uncontrolled neurosis was here allowed to be no more than elegant". He continues that Peter Firth "seemed dwarfed by pretty furniture".

One of the major problems the production faced was how far could they risk portraying the element of homosexuality in Wilde's novel (Tanitch 389). Critics widely disagree on this topic: while James Murray claims that the adaptation is a "controversial production since adapter John Osborne and producer Cedric Messina have boldly spelled out the homosexual theme of Wilde's tale", DeJongh argues that "not a flicker of amorality came through". Additionally, Sylvia Clayton states that

[i]t would have been easy in today's changed social climate to emphasise knowingly the homosexual connotation of the story. Rightly, however, the tale was told as written, as a morality, a Victorian commentary on the price of self-indulgence. (*Daily Telegraph* 20 Sept. 1976)

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<sup>18</sup> Certain reviews used for the analysis in this thesis have been taken from Micro Jackets provided by the *British Film Institute* in London and do not contain page numbers. The citation in the text does therefore only include the name of the author while the full reference is given in the bibliography.

Since there is no agreement among critics as to which degree the theme of homosexuality was made clear in the adaptation, one part of the analysis of Osborne's version will focus on this aspect. It can be said, in the words of de Jongh, that Osborne's adaptation, although staying very close to its literary parent, "takes the novel on its surface value". He did not try and delve deeper into Wilde's work and explore its full potential. Instead he decided to turn the novel into a classic film which would not face as much criticism as its source text.

### **3.2.3.1. Story**

In a studio in London, two men argue about a painting. While Henry Wotton suggests that it is so marvellous it should be exhibited, Basil declines the offer by saying that he has "put too much of [himself] into it" (00:01:56) and he further elaborates: "I think that every portrait that is painted with feelings is a portrait of the artist and not the sitter," (00:04:20). Curious to meet the young man in the picture Henry urges Basil to introduce him to his model, Dorian Gray. Henry tells Dorian about sins and temptations, about the brevity of youth and urges him to live his life while he can. When Dorian sees his portrait he says, "This picture will always remain young. It will never be older than this particular day in June. If only it could grow old instead of me. I would give my soul for that" (00:15:09-00:15:21).

A month later, Dorian tells Henry that he has fallen in love with an actress who plays Juliet, named Sybil Vane. He suggests that Henry and Basil join him to come and see her play at the Bristol Theatre, but that night her acting seems terrible. Dorian is upset and angry at Sybil, who justifies her performance with her love for the young Adonis. Dorian is so disappointed in her that he decides never to see her again. He calls her "shallow" (00:46:17) and "stupid" (00:46:19) and turns his back on the desperate and crying Sybil. When Dorian returns to his house he takes a look at his painting and observes a cruel touch around the mouth of the portrait. Frightened by what he has seen he decides to write a letter to Sybil the next morning to apologize to her and ask her forgiveness. Henry Wotton arrives to inform Dorian that seventeen-year old Sybil has

swallowed something by accident and that she is dead. Dorian is overwhelmed by the news and says, “So, I have murdered Sibyl Vane, just as if I’d cut her throat myself with a knife” (00:54:22).

Several years pass by Basil comes to try and warn Dorian about the horrible things that are said about him. Dorian decides to show Basil his ‘soul’ and leads him to his old schoolroom where he draws back the curtain to expose what has been hidden underneath for so many years. Basil screams in horror and begs Dorian to go on his knees to pray with him. “I told you Basil, prayer comes too late” (01:16:28). Dorian grabs a knife and stabs Basil, leaving his dead body on the schoolroom floor.

Weeks after Basil’s death, Henry and Dorian meet at the painter’s old studio. Dorian blames Henry for all that he has become, how he poisoned him. He talks about a young girl, Hetty, who reminded him of Sybil Vane, and how he had spared her by breaking up with her. Dorian Gray goes up to his old schoolroom to see the painting, smiling and expecting a change after he had spared Hetty. The audience sees the changed portrait for the first time. His face looks pale and wrinkled, with stains around his mouth. There is blood on his hand for when he killed Basil. Shocked and furious at the same time Dorian decides to destroy the painting and stabs it with a knife. In pain he sinks to the floor, and we see that he has killed himself.

### **3.2.3.2. Characters and Structure**

John Osborne’s play is quite different from the former two adaptations. It retains the original story by Oscar Wilde and hardly alters the plot or adds new characters. Director John Gorrie concentrated more on transferring the novel to the screen as faithfully as possible for British television audiences (even the actors were chosen to resemble the looks described in the novel), with a very strong performance by John Gielgud as Lord Henry Wotton. He dominates most scenes and perfectly manages to bring across Wilde’s original lines in a very convincing way. Henry represents the exact image of a Wildean dandy as has been described previously. Dressed in the most elegant and fashionable way he shares his thoughts on youth, beauty, art and life wherever he can,

always enchanting his audience.

Osborne decided to leave most of the original plot unchanged. Therefore, in the film, Dorian rejects Sybil after she fails as an actress to play Juliet (not because she gives in to him physically as in Lewin's or Jordan's version). However, the revenge of her death by her brother James Vane almost fades into nothingness in this 1976 adaptation. Despite his appearance at the beginning before he is said to leave for Australia and despite his concern about Sybil's relationship with a man whose name they do not know, James Vane only appears later on to threaten Dorian in his house. When he sees that Dorian is too young to be the murderer of his sister he lets him go and does not return again.

Moreover the portrait and Dorian's moral decay do not play as important a role as in previous adaptations. In fact, the audience only sees the fully changed picture once, at the very end of the film, and is shown no scenes of immorality throughout the rest of it. We never see him go to bars, opium dens or prostitutes therefore it is difficult for the audience to judge on his debaucherous lifestyle. Most of the story is concerned with Dorian's relationship with Sybil, Basil and Henry's influence over him.

Concerning the structure of the film it can be said that Osborne decided not to make use of a voice-over, neither by an omniscient narrator nor as an inner monologue by Dorian Gray. The audience, therefore, never learns what the characters and especially Dorian are thinking and what causes him to commit the crimes that he does. A structuring device that Osborne did use, though, is that he divided the film into sixteen chapters, all of which are entitled: An Inspiration, A Very Bad Influence, Colour & Canvas, Life & Literature, The Practicality of Marriage, Falling in Love, The Perfect Pleasure, A Big Disappointment, Life Goes On, Romantic Tragedies, A Confession, A Work of Art, The Terrible Truth, Life & Death, Culture & Corruption, A Tragic End. Many of these titles refer to Lord Henry Wotton's theories of life (e.g. The Perfect Pleasure or The Practicality of Marriage).

Overall, John Gorrie's version is probably the most faithful adaptation of Wilde's original story and unlike the filmmakers that preceded him, Gorrie decided not to add his own interpretations of the novel in the film. Because of this literal approach, neither its

plot nor the visualization of Wilde's work are very surprising. It seems as if the script was written for the stage rather than for the screen since almost all of the scenes are set indoors (except for Basil's garden in front of his studio) and the number of characters in one scene is usually limited to a few. There are no crowd scenes, no quick changes of scenery. Like the novel itself, the film appears to be rather static and to consist mostly of dialogue between the characters.

### 3.2.3.3. Themes and Motifs

Despite being faithful to its hypotext, Osborne's adaptation proved to be problematic concerning the topic of homosexuality. In his review in *Daily Express* on 18 September 1976, John Murray claims that this adaptation is "a controversial production, since adapter John Osborne and producer Cedric Messina have boldly spelled out the homosexual theme of Wilde's tale".

Although the film does not show any explicit scenes of physical intimacy, whether between characters of the same or the opposite sex, it does contain several instances which can easily be analysed as homoerotic. On the one hand, there is the scene in which Basil confesses his love to Dorian. Basil has shown deep affection and jealousy throughout the film, but in this scene he openly addresses how he feels about the young man. He claims that his complete fascination with, and attraction to, Dorian Gray, his personality and appearance, were the reasons for not exhibiting the painting, for he feared that people would see what was behind the work of art:

You became for me the visible incarnation of that unseen ideal. I worshipped you. I grew jealous of anyone you spoke to. I wanted to have you all to myself. I was only happy when I was with you. When you were away from me, you were still present in my work. I could never tell you this, you could not have understood. I hardly understood myself. I only know...and I knew then, that I had seen perfection, face to face, and that the world had become wonderful in my eyes. [...] As I was painting every flake and film of colour seemed to reveal my love for you. I felt I had told too much, put too much of myself into it.  
(PODG 1976, 01:04:40-01:05:45)

In another scene, Dorian urges Allen Campbell to help him to get rid of the corpse of

Basil Hallward. Dorian continuously touches Allen's shoulders, sitting next to him, pressing his body against him. The tone in Dorian's voice and the look on Allen's face indicate a much deeper relationship between the two men than friendship. Tanitch claims that "[t]he actors, fully clothed, sat in chairs, head to head, and played the scene as if they were in bed" (389). John Gorrie originally wanted to shoot the scene in bed but was then told by the production company that he should replace the scene if he wanted to have sales in America (Tanitch 389). Overall it can be said that the relationship between Basil and Dorian is much more intimate in Gorrie's adaptation than it was in previous versions and can definitely be judged as homosexual. The intense emotional connection between the artist and his sitter is established from the very beginning of the film and lasts until Dorian kills him.

#### **3.2.3.4. Transtextuality**

John Gorrie's aim was to adapt Oscar Wilde's novel as faithful as possible, which is also why he chose the actors in the film to resemble the characters' looks in *Dorian Gray* as closely as possible. As in the book, Dorian Gray is a young Adonis with golden hair and blue eyes, and Lord Henry Wotton is portrayed as the perfect Dandy, in appearance as in performing. Gorrie's desire to follow the novel so faithfully is also the reason why the film makes constant transtextual references to its source text. Every line in the film is based on a conversation in the book. For example, the scene in which Sybil justifies her bad acting is only a shortened version of the exact same scene in the novel (DG 77):

Before I knew you, acting was the only reality of my life. I only lived for the theatre. I thought it was all true what went on. And then you came. Dorian, my dearest, you freed me from all that. You taught me reality. Tonight for the first time in my life I saw the hollowness of everything I'd devoted myself to. You made me understand what love really is! (PODG 1976, 00:45:20-00:45:43)

Besides, John Gorrie is the only adaptor among the films analysed for this thesis, to include the character of 'Hetty' in his adaptation. Oscar Wilde uses this character to show Dorian's intent to save someone and to redeem his own soul.

Overall it can be said that John Gorrie did not make any apparent transtextual

references to other texts than *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. He adapted Wilde's story, characters and setting and uses the novel's original lines whenever the film script allows it (however, he had to shorten most conversations due to the restricted length of a feature film). What is more, Gorrie also adapted some of the transtextual references that Wilde himself made in the novel. An example for this would be Sybil playing *Shakespeare's* Juliet and killing herself by drinking (what is most likely) poison. While other filmmaker's decided to alter Sybil's role in their versions, John Gorrie showed fidelity to the source text in this regard as well.

#### **3.2.4. Summary**

The literal translations of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* have shown that the directors chose not to change the integral meaning of the source text but to try and remain as faithful to the literary parent as possible. Fidelity therefore played an important role in the early feature film adaptations of *Dorian Gray*. The films maintained the original plot structure and chronology of the novel. However, several changes seemed to be necessary in order to 'translate' Wilde's work for the purpose of a film. Those changes considered adding new characters to the scene (Gladys in Albert Lewin's version and Beatrice in Glenn Jordan's film) or using various transtextual references (established between the films and the novel) in order to support or emphasise Wilde's original words. Additionally, directors also tend to absorb alterations made by previous filmmakers, as is shown in Glenn Jordan's adaptation, which used Lewin's film as a further source text.

The most prominent changes were made to the relationship between Dorian and Sybil, and the balance between male and female characters in the films in general. As described above, Albert Lewin and Glenn Jordan decided to change the reason for Dorian's break-up with Sybil in order to emphasize the theme of morality and moral behaviour in their films. They also both included an additional character (Gladys/Beatrice) to add a romantic aspect to the film and to show the audience how much time passes in the film. In contrast to Lewin and Jordan, John Osborne decided to

remain most faithful to Wilde's novel as regards its plot and characters. However, he did not elaborate on the moral level of the original story or include his own interpretation of the source text.

Of the three adaptations mentioned here, it can be argued that Albert Lewin's is overall the most successful one. Despite the fact that Lewin's achievements were also due to a generous production schedule and budget, which the other versions lacked, he managed to create a work of his own while still remaining faithful to the aesthetics of its hypotext by carefully visualizing Wilde's themes and symbolism. The success of his film can also be seen in the fact that Glenn Jordan regarded Lewin's adaptation as so well produced that he decided to even adapt certain ideas. Considering faithfulness however, John Gorrie's version has to be regarded as the most successful adaptation.

### **3.3. Traditional Translations**

As Cahir argues, most film adaptations are traditional translations of the source text (*Approaches* 21). In those translations "the filmmakers stay as closely as possible to the original literary text, while making those alterations that are deemed necessary and/or appropriate" (21). Those changes can for example mean that the setting is changed to a different time, the directors break with the chronology of the book, invent new scenes or change the gender of characters. Alterations are usually motivated by the "filmmakers' interpretive insight or stylistic interests [or] are driven by a need to keep the film's length and its budget manageable, and to maintain interests and tastes of a popular audience" (21). Despite traditional translations allow a greater interpretative freedom and to explore the "integral meanings of the parent literary text", they also often fail to convince audiences who are in favour of more faithful adaptations.

For the purpose of this paper, Cahir's definition of a 'traditional translation' had to be slightly altered, since certain films in the section below already go beyond "revamping particular details" (Cahir, *In/Fidelity* 200) and include radical interpretations of Wilde's novel. However, since they maintain Oscar Wilde's original plot and characters overall, and because they cannot be clearly identified as 'radical', they will be regarded as

'traditional'. This also corresponds with what has been said before, namely Cahir's suggestion that these three translation modes are often used together but that "one translation mode will normally dominate in a movie" (*In/Fidelity* 201). This has also already become obvious in the analysis of literal translations, since all filmmakers decided to slightly alter the source text, despite overall producing a 'literal adaptation'.

### **3.3.1. *Das Bildnis des Dorian Gray* (1969)**

Massimo Dallamano's 1969/70 West German/Italian film is also known as (*The Secret of*) *Dorian Gray* and *Il Dio Chiamato Dorian*. The 91-minute-long adaptation features Herbert Lom as Lord Henry and Helmut Berger as Dorian Gray. Despite being set in London, the film no longer portrays the Victorian society of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century but rather London in the 1960s or 70s. Dallamano's adaptation did not gain much critical praise when it appeared on German television in 1969. Reviews were mostly negative, calling the adaptation "ludicrous" and the actor's performance "embarrassing" (see Tanitch 385). Tanitch also claims that Dallamano's film is "tawdry" and criticises it for its ridiculous plot development, "spoiling one of the novel's major surprises" right at the beginning of the film. Moreover he argues that most of the verbal beauty gets lost in the American dubbed version (385). Kirsten von Hagen argues that he used the story of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as "foils for various erotic abbreviations" (114) and that even the portrait reflects the casual transformation of the source text. Despite being recognized for the casting of Helmut Berger as the perfect Dorian Gray, the film was regarded as cheap and ridiculous (Tanitch 385).

#### **3.3.1.1. Story**

Massimo Dallamano's film begins with a murder – we see a man stumbling down a staircase with bloody hands. This man is Dorian Gray, who narrates in a flashback the events that have led to this moment: the beautiful, young and naive Dorian models for the latest painting by the artist Basil Hallward. Henry, one of Basil's customers, insists to exhibit Basil's work but the painter declines, saying it meant too much to him to let it be

seen by the public. Henry tells Dorian to be careful not to waste his youth, but to savour it. According to Henry, Dorian only has a few years to live his life fully, since God quickly takes away what he has given (00:26:30). Influenced by Henry's words, Dorian grows jealous of the eternal youth of his portrait and wishes that the painting would grow old in his stead. From this moment on, Dorian is possessed with his picture. He claims that he will never change, that he will always stay as he is now. Only the surface matters to him, he is not interested in anything else.

The love of Dorian's life is an actress, called Sybil Vane, who he meets one night in a little theatre, while she rehearses for her role as Juliet. They immediately fall in love with each other and every free moment is spent together. As Dorian's obsession with his portrait grows, their relationship is also on the decline. Henry's influence over him grows steadily. When Sybil fails to play her role as Juliet convincingly on the stage one night, Dorian is so disappointed that he leaves her. The next morning, Dorian recognizes a change in the portrait for the first time. Scared and uncertain what the reasons behind this change could be he sends a telegram to Sybil to ask her forgiveness and begs her to come back to him but Sybil Vane is already dead. She had killed herself.

Poisoned by Henry's words he decides to live his life and use every opportunity to gain new experiences. He decides to sell his country estate Selby to one of Henry's wealthy friends and buys a yacht. Dorian is obsessed with the painting but decides to hide it in his attic. In the following course of the film Dorian is seen travelling the world, having sex with various women and also a sexual encounter with Henry Wotton is indicated. He sinks deeper and deeper into debauchery and the portrait turns into the 'living image' of his soul. When Basil tries to call upon Dorian's conscience, reminding him about what is wrong and what is right (01:12:41) Dorian drags him to the attic, to show him his 'soul'. At the sight of the horrible picture, Basil sinks on his knees and starts to pray. Dorian grabs a knife and stabs Basil.

Haunted by his past and all his immoral actions Dorian begins to hallucinate. He wants to feel clean again, to wash all the sins he has committed off his hands. When Dorian learns that Allen Campbell, whom Dorian blackmailed into destroying Basil's corpse, has killed himself, he hurries to the portrait in the attic and decides to destroy it.

He cannot bear its existence anymore. All the memories of the evil deeds he has done return to him at once. When he stabs the painting with a knife he sinks to the floor, dead. The painting, however, returns to its original state.

### 3.3.1.2. Characters and Structure

Massimo Dallamano decided to take Oscar Wilde's novel out of its Victorian London setting and transfer it to, what is most likely, London in the 1960s or 1970s. Arguably, this choice was made in order for the audiences in 1969/70 to be able to relate to the film more easily. Despite the fact that Dallamano adapted the original story and characters, he decided to make considerable changes to the source text: the characters differ notably from the novel, especially considering their behaviour. Basil, for example, seems to be utterly besotted with his sitter at the beginning of the film and claims that Dorian is "unique" ("einzigartig") (DG 1969, 00:16:14) and further elaborates that he is a "combination of pure beauty and masculinity" ("Verbindung von reiner Schönheit und Männlichkeit") (00:16:16-00:16:19) and "a symbol of eternal youth" ("das Symbol ewiger Jugend") (00:16:21). However, throughout the film Basil appears to be much more cynical and confident than in the book; his relationship with his art is of a far less romantic nature than Basil had in the novel. He even mocks Dorian's relationship with the young actress by calling Dorian the "last innocent human on earth" ("letzten unschuldigen Menschen auf der Welt") (00:14:36) and by referring to Sybil Vane as a "stripper" (00:14:18). Further, in this adaptation, Basil is less concerned about introducing his young friend to Henry. Therefore, the 'relationship triangle' between the three men is not as strong as in Oscar Wilde's novel.

Henry Wotton, in this version, is one of Basil's customers. He shows an interest in buying and exhibiting his paintings and usually appears with his sister Gwendolen, who is not mentioned in the novel. Henry is said to recite frequently the "epigrams of Oscar Wilde" ("die Epigramme von Oscar Wilde") (00:18:13) and he urges Dorian to live his youth to the fullest, without restraint (00:04:09). Dallamano added the role of Gwendolyn, Henry's sister in his adaptation. Henry and his sister seem to be two halves

of one personality, they both recite from the novel and share thoughts on hedonism, pleasure, youth and marriage. Gwendolyn's role does not become clear throughout the film, apart from her support to lead Dorian deeper into his moral decline.

Sybil Vane's character is a lot more prominent in Dallamano's version than in the book. Not only is her on-screen time considerably longer than in previous adaptations, also, she is notably more confident and quick-witted.

Concerning the structure of the film it can be said that Dallamano changed the chronology of events of the source text. He decided to begin the film with a flashforward in which Dorian kills Basil, therefore he already anticipates one of the major climaxes of the story. After this, the film concentrates on the first encounter between Dorian and Sybil. Also, he inserted several scenes that are not part of the novel, for instance when Dorian sells his house in Selby, or the scenes on the yacht. One could argue that Dallamano quite freely interpreted what Wilde wrote 'between the lines' and therefore excessively portrayed what Wilde could only carefully indicate in his novel. This for example concerns the frequent portrayal of sexual encounters and open homosexuality in the film.

### **3.3.1.3. Themes and Motifs**

Two themes are important to Dallamano's adaptation: love and obsession. On the one hand, there is the relationship between Sybil and Dorian, which is at the center. This adaptation heavily focuses on their falling in love, their regular meetings and future plans. Despite the concerns of her brother, Sybil says she will love him forever and calls him her "prince charming" ("Märchenprinz") (00:20:02). This adds a considerable note of romance to the film. On the other hand, however, Dorian grows more and more obsessed with his painting. He is very passionate and dramatic about his portrait from the beginning. Dorian describes it as a part of himself saying that he wants to remain as young as he looks in the portrait. Dorian claims, "I would give my soul, if I could achieve that" ("ich würde meine Seele geben, wenn ich das erreichen könnte") (00:29:28). When Basil wants to destroy it Dorian screams "do you want to kill me?" ("willst du mich

umbringen?“) (00:29:55). He seems to have a very emotional relationship with his painting, regarding it as part of himself. The theme of the alter ego, his mirror, is therefore much stronger in this adaptation. The obsession with ‘surface’ is intensified by Henry’s hedonistic principles Dorian refuses to see the value in anything but the outer beauty of things. Anything beneath that is of no interest to him: “apart from beauty, we’ll reckon nothing” (“wir betrachten nur die Schönheit, und sonst gar nichts”) (00:33:40).

A further theme which is taken up by Dallamano is sexuality in connection with Dorian’s moral decline and debauchery. The film significantly elaborates on scenes with sexual content and the director did not hesitate to include explicit sex scenes and open homosexuality. In the film Dorian is not only shown having sex with Sybil Vane but also with Henry’s sister and Allen Campbell’s wife. More sexual encounters with several other women and men (of all age groups and races), as well as Henry Wotton, are implied.

Massimo Dallamano also decided to include instances of voyeurism in the film, connected to the idea of ‘the gaze’. In *Dictionary of Film Terms* “the gaze” is “[a] concept in cinematic discourse which theorizes that directed awareness and accompanying visual pleasure can be/are derived from the ‘gaze’ of the film spectator as controlled by the camera’s eye” (112). Frequently throughout the movie, characters are being watched, observed or secretly photographed by other characters in the film. For instance, in the second half of the film, there is a photographer who takes pictures of Dorian’s sexual encounters, usually through windows. Dorian is watched by the men and women who adore him and by the people who read the magazines which have his face on them. Dorian, in return, is obsessively drawn to gaze upon his own painting and the hideous face of his soul. The audience as well acts a part in this kind of voyeurism, since the most intimate scenes are shown on the screen, almost as if one were peeping through a keyhole.

Overall Massimo Dallamano went beyond Wilde’s original story and added significantly to the source text. He was less concerned with the topic of youth and beauty than with the temptation to be free to do whatever one wants to do. Dallamano elaborated on Dorian’s moral decline in ways that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* could and would never have revealed, almost ridiculously exaggerating the theme of sexuality.

Considering that even Glenn Jordan's and John Osborne's adaptations have been criticised for indications of homoeroticism, despite being released years after Dallamano's film, it is not surprising that audiences in 1969 could not relate to this version.

#### 3.3.1.4. Transtextuality

On a transtextual level, Dallamano's adaptation not only refers to Wilde's novel but also to previous adaptations. The relationship with *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is quite openly advertised in the film and despite the changes Dallamano made to the source text, he has kept the original title as well as the character's names. He also remained faithful to their appearances as described in the book. A direct reference is made to Wilde, as Basil mocks Henry for reciting the "epigrams of Oscar Wilde" ("die Epigramme von Oscar Wilde") (00:18:13) at an early point in the film. Throughout the adaptation characters use Wilde's original phrases<sup>21</sup> despite most of the time the lines are taken out of context. Further, the film ends with the translation of the ending of the novel. After Dorian has stabbed the portrait, the on screen text reads: "[i]t was not till they had examined the [ring] that they recognized who it was" (see Oscar Wilde *DG*, 194) ("Erst als sie den Ring sahen, erkannten sie, wer es war") (01:29:50).

Concerning references to other adaptations, it is interesting that Dallamano includes a character named Gladys in the second half of his film, who is possibly related to Lewin's adaptation. She is the wife of one of Henry's friends but despite Dorian being attracted to her, he decides not to seduce her. Dallamano decides to abandon the romantic element in his film and to concentrate on the aspect of pushing the boundaries of immorality. Another, transtextual, relationship is created through the setting of the film. The film never makes clear in which period it is set, however, from today's perspective it becomes quite obvious that the film is set in the 1960s or 1970s, especially because of the way characters dress, details like cars and advertisements on the streets and Sybil's frequently listening to rock and roll music.

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<sup>21</sup> However, since Dallamano's adaptation is a German film, the 'original' phrases were translated into this language.

### 3.3.2. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (2004)

David Rosenbaum's drama was one of the first two films which adapted *Dorian Gray* for the big screen after 1984. In the meantime, no other filmmaker had taken up the challenge to make Wilde's novel into a movie. Released in Europe with the Italian subtitle "*Il ritratto del male*" ("the portrait of evil") the film introduces young Josh Duhamel as Dorian Gray and features Branden Waugh as Harry Wotton and Rainer Judd as Basil Ward. While being regarded as a 'traditional translation' overall, the alterations of the character's names already indicate that Rosenbaum's adaptation also includes a radical approach to its literary parent.

David Rosenbaum's adaptation was not very well received by audiences and is only rated as an 'average' film (4.3 out of 10 on IMDB)<sup>22</sup>. Despite the textual fidelity towards the source novel, Rosenbaum's characters overall fail to express Wilde's original words and hardly manage to reach the audience. While some reviewers argue that it was a convincing choice to cast a woman for the role of the painter, calling Rainer Judd's portrayal the "best and most realized performance" (IMDB s.v. "The Picture of Dorian Gray 2005"), overall, the film was perceived as a poor adaptation of Oscar Wilde's novel.

#### 3.3.2.1. Story

David Rosenbaum's adaptation opens with a voice-over that tells the audience: "behind every exquisite thing that exists, there is always something tragic" (00:01:27). The protagonist Dorian Gray is the son of a wealthy family. Since his grandfather killed not only himself but also Dorian's mother, Dorian grew up as an orphan. As an adult Dorian meets Basil, a renowned artist who is so enchanted by the looks of the young man that she asks him to sit for her paintings. Through Basil, Dorian is introduced to Harry, who encourages Dorian to appreciate his looks and youth while he has the chance to do so.

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<sup>22</sup> Since hardly any information was available concerning the success of Rosenbaum's film, I decided to take the rating on *The Internet Movie Database*, and viewer's reviews into account, since they most accurately reflect audience reactions.

As Basil finishes the portrait Harry rates it the “finest portrait of modern times” (00:18:45) but Dorian solely envies the portrait because it will always remain young. He wishes for it to be the other way round. He claims that he is “in love” with the painting (00:20:20) and that it is “a part of [him]self” (00:20:23).

Time passes and Dorian falls in love with an opera singer called Sybil Vane, who only knows him by the name of “prince charming” (00:22:36). However, when Sybil acts dreadful one night Dorian is so disappointed by her lack of artistic talent that he leaves her. Sybil claims that his love made her understand the dullness of acting, that she suddenly realized what reality really was and that she would never be a good actress again. Devastated by the loss of the love of her life, Sybil hangs herself on the stage of the opera. After Dorian learns that Sybil committed suicide he, for the first time, notices that his portrait had changed and that it suddenly showed a cruel touch around the lips. In this moment, that Dorian realises that his wish had come true, and that from now on, the portrait would carry the burden of his actions.

In his search for new sensations and driven by Harry’s words to live his life to the fullest, Dorian explores the underworld of the city during the following years, visiting promiscuous clubs. One night a woman in a night bar calls him a “devil’s bargain” (01:05:53) and “prince charming” (01:06:01). When she calls him by that name, James Vane, Sybil’s brother, recognizes the man who drove his sister to suicide. He learns that Dorian has not aged for the last eighteen years. In a car chase through the city Dorian ultimately causes James’s car to crash, killing him in the process. Back at his house Dorian is surprised by Basil who demands to see Dorian’s soul, to see what “only god can see” (01:14:09). She follows him to his old nursery and cannot believe what she sees in the painting. Disappointed that her ideal has been ruined, and while she kneels on the floor and prays to god, Dorian shoots her in the chest. Dorian confesses his murder to Harry, who, at first, refuses to believe him. He asks him to help him discard the body in the sea.

In the last scene, when Dorian returns to his house, he goes up to the attic, recalling his life. We hear a shot – and see Dorian lying dead on the floor, looking like his other self in the painting.

### 3.3.2.2. Characters and Structure

Similar to Dallamano's film, Rosenbaum took a few liberties with the adaptation of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* for the screen. For instance, he decided to turn Wilde's Basil Hallward into a woman named Basil Ward, possibly in order to explore the opportunities that would come with the sex change. In the novel Basil always acts like the more sensible and more responsible character. His adoration for Dorian goes beyond the artistic level. By transforming Basil's character into a woman, Rosenbaum was able to further focus on Basil's emotional struggles and create a slightly romantic relationship between her and Dorian. Besides, this alteration made it possible to view the triangular relationship between her, Dorian and Harry from a different angle than in the novel. In this adaptation, Basil and Harry also share a more intimate relationship compared to Wilde's original story. Basil calls him her "first romance" (00:14:13), and deplores that he married someone else. In the course of the film Basil and Harry eventually get married but break up again as Dorian seduces her on her wedding day. However, while Basil's sex change allows for an openly romantic relationship between her and the two male characters, the film lacks the level of a homoerotic relationship between its protagonists. In order to make the film more easily accessible for a younger audience, Rosenbaum further decided to make the characters younger than in the book. The audience is given information on the characters' age through Dorian who claims that he had "never before heard anyone under thirty talk so arrogantly about the world" (00:14:59).

Rosenbaum also included a glimpse into Dorian's past. Right at the beginning of the film the audience learns about how Dorian's family wealth was inherited from his grandfather. Dorian's grandfather shot his mother in order to "free them from this torment" (00:03:00) because he felt haunted by the victims of the atomic bomb. However, he spares his grandson and turns the gun on himself, bestowing "a legacy of damnation" (00:03:48). In this flashback about Dorian's childhood, the director also introduces the theme of the soul and its eternal punishment.

Concerning its structure it can be said that the film generally follows Oscar Wilde's original story. The sequence of events is maintained, despite the alteration of most

scenes. Rosenbaum even decides to keep a large number of Wilde's epigraphs. Besides, the film is divided into five chapters, all of which are preceded by text plates on screen. The first three text plates include (slightly altered) quotes from the novel:

Chapter I, 'Every impulse that we strive to strangle broods in the mind and poisons us.' 10 Years pass. (00:04:05) – 'Influence' (00:04:13)

Chapter II. 'In this world there are only two tragedies. One is not getting what we want. And the other is getting it'. 6 months pass. (00:21:08) – Romance. (00:21:17)

Chapter III. " 'Those who are faithful know only the trivial side of love; it is the faithless who know love's tragedies.' (00:38:51) – Sin. (00:39:00)

The last two were written by David Rosenbaum:

Chapter IV: 'The years pass and for reasons of influence and romance, Harry and Basil forgive Dorian. However, new wars loom and those who watch the battle will be more deeply wounded than those who take part". (00:59:58) – 'Revenge' (01:00:12).

Chapter V. 'Live exclusively on the surface and you will certainly drown in the depths. Something was dead in each of them, and what was dead was hope.' (01:19:52)– 'Redemption' (01:20:02).

They not only serve to inform the audience about what has happened but also to prepare them for what to expect in the next section. The intertitles (Influence, Romance, Sin, Revenge, Redemption) are also meant to affect the viewers' expectations and to influence the film's reception.

### **3.3.2.3. Themes and Motifs**

In this version, the theme of the soul is very prominent. It is mentioned in the text plates right at the beginning of the film (see above) and plays an important role throughout the film. Basil claims that she has added a part of her soul to the portrait as she was painting it since "every portrait that is painted with feeling, is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter" (00:06:28). She refuses to exhibit it because she does not want to expose her soul to the public. What is more, Basil is fascinated with the innocence and purity of Dorian's soul. For Basil, Dorian represents a "simple and beautiful nature" (00:13:09) in

the beginning of the film and he causes her to feel emotions that were unknown to her before and is devastated when she learns what has become of it. When Dorian does not mourn Sybil's death Basil criticises him for his cold behaviour, "you used to be simple, natural, and the most unspoiled creature in the world. Now you talk as if you have no heart" (00:51:33-00:51:41).

In Rosenbaum's adaptation, Sybil Vane plays a less important role than in the novel. Despite her death marking a turning point in the plot and influencing Dorian to give in to debauchery, she is hardly given a voice apart from her performances as an opera singer on stage. Therefore, the romantic aspect of the film is mainly created through Basil's adoration for Dorian and further, because of the romance between Basil and Harry.

This film includes the theme of 'selling one's soul'. When Dorian wishes his portrait to grow old while he always remains young, he makes a fatal 'pact with the devil'. Later on in the film he is also referred to as being a "devil's bargain" (01:05:53). Additionally, Basil calls Dorian's altered portrait "the face of the devil" (01:15:44). This is the first adaptation in which the 'pact with the devil' is so openly addressed. However, the idea was adapted by Allen A. Goldstein, as will be described below. In previous adaptations the audience is led to believe that Dorian's wish is granted by mystical or supernatural force.

#### **3.3.2.4. Transtextuality**

Despite adding a considerable number of changes to the source text, Rosenbaum's adaptation literally retains most of Wilde's famous epigrams. Almost all conversations between characters are identical with the corresponding scenes in the novel. The language of Victorian London is contradicted by the rather modern setting of the film, ateliers are exchanged for sea shores, the bars of the London underworld for discos. Similar to previous adaptations, Rosenbaum included a scene in his film which was not part of Oscar Wilde's novel, but which was featured in John Osborne's adaptation from 1976. Rosenbaum decided to include 'Basil's confession' (see Section 3.2.3.3) in his

version, although this time it was not used to portray a homosexual relationship between two men, as in the novel. In the film it serves to stress (a female) Basil's romantic feelings for Dorian. Rosenbaum's version therefore repeats the tendency of filmmakers to adapt characters or scenes from earlier adaptations of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

As mentioned above, the film does not make a clear reference to the exact year in which it is set. However, the lines stated at the very beginning of the film, give some indication:

Between wars in the land of hypocrite, an atom splits and millions die.  
The country is divided. Science against art. Man versus nature.  
The dead will torment. The living will suffer. Souls will be reborn.  
(PODG 2004, 00:00:01-00:01:04)

Analysing those words it becomes clear that they describe the happenings that are linked to the invention of the atomic bomb and the beginnings of nuclear warfare. "Between wars in the land of hypocrite", refers to America at the time between World War II and the nuclear war against Japan. Further, "an atom splits and millions die" points at the aftermath of the two atomic bombs America dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, which led to the deaths of tens of thousands. The following split between the supporters and opponents of nuclear weapons ("The country is divided.") was enforced by the fact that even the scientists who participated in creating the bomb regarded it as a nothing but a tool of destruction ("Science against art. Man versus nature."). By making those references to historical events, the film can only be set in a time after 1945. Despite of the lack of further information though, the audience never learns how much time had passed between 1945 and the scene in which Dorian's grandfather kills his mother.

Rosenbaum's film does not only make references to the story and original words of *Dorian Gray* but also openly refers to the book, its author. The last frame tells the audience about Oscar Wilde

Oscar Wilde was forced to defend his only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, in a trial that resulted in his imprisonment, bankrupted him and destroyed him.  
(01:23:12)

Furthermore it is stated,

'Yes, there is a terrible moral in *Dorian Gray*, a moral which the prurient will not find, but will be revealed to all whose minds are healthy.

It is a tragedy that mirrors my life. Harry is what the world thinks of me. Basil is who I think I am. And Dorian is who I would like to be...in another life perhaps' [Oscar Wilde 1854-1900]. (01:23:23-01:23:43)

By including those references to the author of the novel, Rosenbaum encourages the audience to search for the moral aspect in the film and to see the characters in relation to Wilde's own tragic life.

### 3.3.3. *Dorian Gray* (2009)

In 2009, the most recent film adaptation (for the present) of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* reached a worldwide audience. Director Oliver Parker 'translated' the novel into a 112-minute-long film, starring prominent actors like Ben Barnes as Dorian Gray, Colin Firth<sup>24</sup> as Lord Henry Wotton and Rachel Hurd Wood as Sibyl Vane. Parker was already experienced in adapting Oscar Wilde for the big screen, since in 1999 he adapted *An Ideal Husband* and in 2002 *The Importance of being Ernest*. For *Dorian Gray*, Parker decided to turn his film into a classic adaptation of Wilde's novel by remaining faithful to the setting in Victorian London and most of the original story. However, he integrated his own ideas by adding new characters and altering the storyline to a degree which makes the film a traditional translation.

Audience opinions about Oliver Parker's film are divided. While one half of reviews on the Internet Movie Database (IMDB s.v. "Dorian Gray 2009") argues that the film is a "masterpiece" and "[a]n excellent adaptation of the book", the other half ("Dorian Gray 2009") is of the opinion that the film was disappointing and claim that "the movie had distorted the original story to a great extent [...] and the characters are very dull and lifeless compared to the book".

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<sup>24</sup> Colin Firth also participated as John 'Jack' Worthing in Oliver Parker's earlier film *The Importance of Being Ernest*.

### 3.3.3.1. Story

Dorian Gray is an innocent young man who returns to his parent's house in London after the death of his grandfather. At a charity event for deserving orphans, he meets Basil Hallward, "one of [the] finest artists" (00:05:42), who is enchanted by the marvellous looks of the young man and who asks Dorian to sit for a portrait. The painter introduces him to London's upper class. Dorian is fascinated by especially Lord Henry Wotton, who teaches him about the importance of youth and the transitoriness of his perfect appearance. Intrigued by the idea of eternal beauty, Dorian wishes to remain always as young as in Basil's portrait of him.

One night, Dorian comes across the "Theatre Royal" (00:20:01), which stages Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Dorian instantly falls for beautiful young girl who plays Ophelia, named Sybil Vane. While Dorian calls Sybil "sacred" (00:23:40), Henry claims that "it's only sacred things that are worth touching. People nowadays fear their passions" (00:23:44-00:23:50). He persuades Dorian to join his visits to opium dens and encourages him to have sex with prostitutes. When Sybil finds out about his unfaithful behaviour and demands to be his wife Dorian decides to break up their relationship. The same night she drowns herself in the river Thames.

After Sybil's suicide, Dorian notices that Basil's portrait of him is changing and he realizes that the wish he made back at the studio has come true. From this moment on, Dorian enjoys all sorts of pleasures and gives into every temptation that comes his way. His portrait remains hidden in the attic and rots with every evil deed he commits. Over time, the painting grows more and more hideous and Dorian decides to leave London to go on a journey to experience all worldly pleasures Henry has told him about. When Dorian returns to London after many years, everyone he knew has grown old while he remained unchanged. Henry observes that Dorian "drank deeply of everything in life and it hasn't left a fleck on [him]" (01:08:36) but also says that he is "against nature" (01:29:25). Dorian fails to find pleasure in anything anymore. He is haunted by the memory of Sybil Vane's death and the presence of the painting in his attic. Emily, Henry's now grown up daughter, causes Dorian to change his life. He realizes that his

soul is “rotten” and “poisoned” (01:23:58) and confesses his sins to a priest. Motivated by the threat that Dorian might destroy the life of his daughter, Henry decides to solve the mystery of Dorian’s youth. He breaks into the room in the attic and finds the painting, which seems to have become alive. Henry and Dorian fight but Henry manages to set the room on fire and lock Dorian in. Emily wants to save him but he decides to stay with his portrait. He takes a knife and sinks it into the canvas, setting the seal on his death.

### **3.3.3.2. Characters and Structure**

At first glance, Oliver Parker’s film appears to be a literal translation of Wilde’s novel. It is only after a closer look that the alterations made to the original text become obvious. Despite the film being set in Victorian London, Parker’s story differs from Wilde’s on several levels. He keeps all of the novel’s characters and names (apart from Henry being called ‘Harry’ in some scenes) but he does not follow the original plot. The circumstances under which things happen have been completely altered and hardly any of the scenes from the book have been adapted for the screen. Parker also broke with the chronology of events of Wilde’s work. Besides, he uses flashbacks and flashforwards not only to show the characters’ past but also to increase suspense.

Similar to Rosenbaum, Parker decided to include background information on the characters’ lives. For example, the audience learns how Basil and Dorian meet at a charity event. Furthermore, the original plot is extended by the story about Dorian’s family and his grandfather. The audience learns that Dorian’s mother fell for a poor artist and after Dorian was born, they both died from typhoid fever. His grandfather, who never approved of his daughter’s relationship, physically abused him as a child and locked him up in the attic. Throughout the film, Dorian is haunted by memories of his grandfather.

In this version the character of Henry is very dominant. He is in total control of what happens and his grasp on Dorian gets tighter and tighter with every scene. It is only at the end, when Dorian seeks to be in a relationship with his daughter, that Henry Wotton begins to see him in a different light. Ultimately, it is Henry who locks up Dorian in the attic to be burnt alive with his portrait.

Dorian's relationship with Sybil is portrayed differently as well in this adaptation. While in the book he comes to the theatre several times before he dares to speak to her for the first time, in the film he comes to see her right at the first evening. Sybil, for her part, is more self-confident and not as impressed by Dorian at first. She is careful about her decisions since she seems to know what happened to other girls who gave themselves to their lovers. The moral decline in this version already begins before he breaks up with Sybil and it is the reason for the failure of their relationship. Therefore the relationship between Sybil and Dorian does not play as important a role as it does in the novel and does not cause Dorian to change for the worse. It is merely a further impulse.

Oliver Parker added the character of Emily to the film in order to create a reason for Dorian to change. Her confidence inspires Dorian to change for the better, adding a romantic element to the film. As Henry's daughter, she also serves to provide deeper background knowledge on his family. Emily is a strong and independent woman who believes in "suffrage" (01:16:37) and demands a woman's right to vote. She is quite a progressive character and adds a female perspective to the story, an angle that was not part of Wilde's novel.

### **3.3.3.3. Themes and Motifs**

The theme of hedonism is very prominent in the film. The characters constantly talk about the importance of beautiful things. For example, Henry tells Dorian that "there's no shame in pleasure" (00:14:51) and moreover, that a "man just wants to be happy but society wants him to be good. And when he's good, man is rarely happy" (00:14:52-00:14:58). In Henry's opinion, "no civilized man regrets a pleasure" (00:30:22) and he summons Dorian to be always "searching for new sensations" (00:30:56). Dorian however wonders if there is not a price to pay for such a behaviour (00:15:05), if there is not an effect on "one's soul" (00:15:16). Henry claims that he prefers to "nail [his] soul to the devil's altar" (00:15:26). While Dorian is eager to explore the world of sensations in the beginning of the film, he later on realizes that his search for pleasure left him utterly unsatisfied and tired of life, claiming that "pleasure is quite different from happiness"

(01:17:29). In the end, he makes Henry responsible for his moral decline as he shouts, “I lived the life that you preached but never dared to practice” (01:37:57), and “I am everything that you were too afraid to be” (01:38:00). Linked to the theme of hedonism and the is the topic of sexual debauchery in Victorian London, which is addressed openly in Oliver Parker’s film. Not only are the characters seen to visit promiscuous bars, gambling halls and opium dens, Dorian is also often shown participating orgies, fight clubs and taking drugs. He frequently plays games with Henry, making bets on whether he is able to seduce people, sometimes even mother and daughter in the same room. Besides, the theme of homosexuality is shown without restraints. Dorian is frequently flirting with male characters in the film and a sexual encounter between Dorian and Basil is indicated, referring to the underlying homoeroticism in the novel.

A further important theme in this adaptation is considered with the relationship between Dorian and his portrait, his doppelgänger, which is considerably obsessive in Parker’s version. While the Dorians in previous adaptations often did not even dare to look at their ‘mirror’ and ‘other self’, Oliver Parker’s Dorian seems to be drawn towards it. With pleasure he is seen sitting in front of his picture taking drugs, as if he tried to observe the immediate changes in his portrait. Besides, he is haunted by the fear that someone might find out about the picture and destroy it. However, despite Dorian realizing the horrible truth of his rotten soul towards the end of the film, he cannot let go of his painting. In the course of the film the portrait seems to develop a life of its own and at times it appears almost as if Dorian’s other self tries to escape the boundaries of the frame. While in former versions the painting only changed on a surface level, in this adaptation it serves to visualise the decay of Dorian’s soul. The portrait is actually rotting, and maggots feeding on the canvas. Therefore, the portrait also adds to the element of horror in the film. Additionally, the overall rather dark film makes frequent use of sound effects, which raise the level of suspense and aim at shocking the audience.

### 3.3.3.4. Transtextuality

The shortening of the title from *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to *Dorian Gray* already indicates that the adaptation made changes to the original text. While it maintained most of Wilde's aphorisms at its core, most of the conversations have been altered.

One of those changes is that in this adaptation, unlike in the novel, Sybil plays the role of Ophelia and not Juliet and her subsequent death is also connected to Ophelia's death in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. While Sybil in the novel presumably took poison to kill herself, just like Juliet, in the film she drowns herself, just like Ophelia. Her actions correspond to the actions of the character she is playing and create a transtextual relationship with Shakespeare's works, in this case *Hamlet*.

What is more, the film makes a transtextual reference to the poem "Death be not proud" by John Donne, which Dorian reads out at Basil's funeral, in order to honour the man who he has killed with his own hands:

Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, kings, and desperate men,  
And dost with poison, warre, and sickness dwell,  
And poppie, or charms can make us sleep as well,  
And better then thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?  
One short sleep past, wee wake eternally,  
And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die.  
(01:02:20-01:02:50)

What is more, the film refers to the adaptations by Lewin and Rosenbaum. Oliver Parker followed the example of previous versions made of *Dorian Gray* and added a female character to the story, an idea that was originally used in Albert Lewin's film. Parker named his character Emily and made her a modern and progressive woman. She is the daughter of Henry and her role serves to establish a romantic twist in the film and to show how much time has elapsed after Dorian's return to London. While in other adaptations Dorian selfishly tries to use, for example, Gladys's innocence to restore his soul, in this adaptation he is honestly trying to become a better person again to deserve Emily's love. The second film Oliver Parker used as inspiration for his adaptation is Rosenbaum's. Similar to the film from 2004, Parker included the background story of Dorian's relationship with his grandfather which has an equally negative connotation.

### 3.3.4. Summary

All three adaptations are considerably different from each other but show the tendency to move away from literal translations and to adapt the novel according to the director's reading of it. This is also the reason why for these three filmmakers fidelity to the source text was not as important as in the literal adaptations discussed above. However, the directors kept the overall structure, story and characters of the novel. As stated by Cahir at the beginning of this section, traditional films are basically based on the "filmmakers' interpretive insight" or the desire to "maintain interests and tastes of a popular audience" (*Approaches* 21), a fact which was also put forward by the adaptations analysed above.

Massimo Dallamano, David Rosenbaum and Oliver Parker all intended a different approach to Wilde's novel. While they decided to create traditional translations of the source text, their perspective varied. Dallamano transferred the story to the 1960s/70s, concentrated on Dorian's narcissism and openly addressed his sexual excesses. He was predominantly concerned with his personal interpretation of Oscar Wilde's novel. Dallamano focussed on the portrayal of Dorian's immoral actions rather than 'tailoring' the film to a 1970s cinema audience. In contrast, David Rosenbaum's version deliberately changed setting, time and characters and elaborated on the theme of 'selling one's soul' and the relationship between a female Basil and her model. While he adapted Wilde's original lines faithfully throughout the film, Rosenbaum decided not to elaborate on the main themes of, for example, homosexuality. Oliver Parker tried another approach. He remained faithful to the setting of Victorian London and Wilde's characters but he changed the story to make it a work on its own. Similar to Dallamano, Parker focussed on the extents of Dorian's immoral actions, focussing on his explorations of sexuality. Overall, Oliver Parker managed to embed the protagonist's debauchery convincingly in a framework based on the novel's themes of hedonism, aestheticism and homosexuality. It is especially due to the choice to set the film against the background of Victorian London and to portray Henry and Dorian as 'Wildean dandies' that this adaptation of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was perceived as more successful than the other two traditional translations.

### 3.4. Radical Translations

Radical film translations allow filmmakers to distance themselves from the original source in a way that literal and traditional translations cannot. Cahir states that such a translation “reshapes the literary work in extreme and revolutionary ways” and leads to a “more fully independent work” (26). The main concern of radical translations is therefore not to remain faithful and to show their respect towards the source text but they are concerned with the “exploration of the integral meanings of the parent literary text” (26). In *Literature into Film: Theory and Practical Approaches*, Cahir further elaborates that

while taken to various degrees, a radical film translation allows for total artistic liberties. The literature’s integral meaning, rather than its literal detail, is of paramount importance to the radical film translator; consequently, the filmic rephrasing of the parent text, under the codes of a radical translation, permits – even celebrates – the alteration of any or all details that promote the filmmakers’ personal vision of the literary work. (27)

These ‘alterations’ can also include “multicultural explorations of literary texts” (26), meaning that filmmakers could transpose the setting to a distant culture (e.g. Indian) and change the source text completely under those premises. Despite offering the filmmaker artistic freedom in adapting the source text, a radical translation can also evoke negative criticism. Cahir claims that this translation mode “runs the risk of becoming so fully self-expressive and self-involved that we may wonder about – at times even suspect – the motives for its proclaimed kinship with the parent literature” (*Approaches* 27).

The analysis of the following three films will demonstrate how directors turned *The Picture of Dorian Gray* into a radical translation, and how they transferred the original story to different cultural backgrounds. A further point of discussion is whether the films still communicate their relationship with the source text to the audience.

#### 3.4.1. *The Sins of Dorian Gray* (1983)

In 1983, Tony Maylam took the story of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and turned it into a film which is set in America in the 1980s. The plot and setting of Tony Maylam’s television film differ notably from the original source: in this version, Dorian is a female

top-model working for a cosmetics company in New York, which is owned by 'Henry Lord'. The 'picture' comes in the form of a tape which she watches from time to time to observe her 'soul' (Tanitch 391). Maylam's adaptation features Bellinda Bauer<sup>25</sup> as Dorian Gray and Anthony Perkins as 'Henry Lord', who had become very popular through Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho I-IV* in which he took over the leading role of Norman Bates.

Reviews of Tony Maylam's adaptations differ considerably from each other. Tanitch's description of the plot of the film suggests that he possibly regarded the updated version of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as trivial (391), since he does not even make the effort to describe the story of this version in greater detail. Despite being regarded as "ridiculous" (see Tanitch 391), the film manages to sustain "an effective aura of gothic glamour enhanced by a haunting simplistic theme song and classy costumes" (Williams qtd. in Tanitch 391). Besides, a reviewer from the *Internet Movie Database* claims that the film has a "captivating atmosphere" (IMDB s.v. "Die Morde des Dorian Gray") and that it is a "beautiful modernized version of the Oscar Wilde classic". Dave Sindelar in contrast argues that "Belinda Bauer [is] singularly unconvincing as Dorian Gray", and further that "the movie degenerates into strident soap opera" (Article #3303). The reason why there is no consent regarding the quality of Maylam's film might be its radical translation of Oscar Wilde's novel. While the changes made to setting, characters and story were praised by one half of the audience, they were condemned by the other half. Overall, the film was rated 5.9 (out of 10) points (representing seventy-five user ratings on IMDB).

#### **3.4.1.1. Story**

In Tony Maylam's adaptation of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian Gray is a woman who, in the beginning, is cast for a role in a "Dorian Gray" film. While she watches the screen test with Sofia Lord, the director of the film, Dorian makes the wish that she would always remain young, while her image on the screen would suffer from age

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<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, Bellinda Bauer worked as a model in New York, just as her character Dorian in the film (IMDB s.v. "Bellinda Bauer [I]").

(00:09:30). Sofia's husband, Henry Lord, is so fascinated with the young woman that he offers her to become the cover-girl for his cosmetic brand called 'Mystique'.

Dorian meets Stuart Vane, a bar singer who immediately falls in love with the beautiful woman. Unfortunately though the young love is clouded by the fact that Stuart is married and that his wife is pregnant. In order to promote Stuart's career as a singer, Dorian and Henry arrange for him to appear on a television show. Stuart, however, appears drunk and Dorian leaves him. The next morning Dorian learns that her lover was killed in a car crash and that it was possibly suicide. As she plays the screentest (00:53:40), her face seems to have aged and her hair has turned grey. Dorian realizes that the wish she made back at the film studio had come true.

In the following years, Dorian becomes isolated and loses her friends. She travels the world to explore new sensations and gain new experiences. While she remains the same, her picture carries the burden of her sins. Driven by the growing fear of the price for her immoral actions, Dorian tells Henry about the secret of her youth and confesses that she killed his wife Sofia. He tells her to leave and never to return again. In search of redemption and forgiveness Dorian leaves America and becomes a nurse in a hospital, where she prays every day for her soul. As she returns to New York ten years later, Harry has already grown old. Dorian claims that she has changed, but Henry cannot believe her. Dorian looks at the screen test one last time, desperate to find some hope for her soul. After she realizes that her past deeds cannot be made undone Dorian destroys her picture by stabbing a knife into the screen. She is seen lying on the floor, as an old woman, while the image on the screen shows her as a young woman again.

#### **3.4.1.2. Characters and Structure**

In *The Sins of Dorian Gray*, the title already indicates that the original story has been significantly changed. In Tony Maylam's version, for the first time in a film, Dorian Gray is a woman, who becomes a model for a huge cosmetics company. The setting is transported to New York in the 1980s and centres around the world of beauty and fashion. Regarding the film's structure one can say that the film follows a linear

chronology and does not contain flashbacks or flashforwards. Besides, the adaptation includes a voice-over, narrated by Lord Henry, in which he informs the audience about his and Dorian's thoughts and feelings.

While the film is still recognizably an adaptation of Oscar Wilde's novel, there is no painting but a screen test, which has been recorded during auditions for a *Dorian Gray* film. Also, the role of Basil has been substituted by Sofia Lord, Henry's wife, Sybil Vane is replaced by a married bar singer called Stuart, and Allen Campbell is a the photographer for the company. But not only the names and sexes of the characters have been changed. Maylam altered their entire character traits. One example for this is Stuart Vane. Apart from his profession as a bar singer, Stuart Vane appears as the exact opposite of Sybil Vane in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. He shares none of Sybil's innocence and purity. On the contrary, he is a married man who tries to cheat on his pregnant wife when pursuing Dorian. He is seen drinking and fighting with his wife. While in the novel Dorian's decision to leave Sybil was regarded as cruel by the reader, in Maylam's version one can easily relate to Dorian breaking up with Stuart. Another example would be Henry Lord. He encourages Dorian to, "live [and not to] be afraid of anything!" (00:21:41) and claims that he "represent[s] all the misadventures [she] never had the courage to commit" (00:43:03). However, despite his intention to seduce Dorian to lead a life of debauchery, Henry Lord appears to have a much more distinct consciousness than Wilde's Lord Henry Wotton. When Henry Lord learns that Dorian has killed his wife, he rejects her and tells her to leave. Even in the end, when she claims that she has changed, he does not want to have anything to do with her. He even seems scared and disgusted by what has become of her.

New characters have been added to the story as well, for example Tracy, Dorian's stylist. She is Dorian's friend in the beginning, but as Dorian grows more and more obsessed with herself, she distances herself from all her friends. Her treatment of Tracy during the second half of the film reflects her disrespectful behaviour towards the people who had formerly been close to her. Overall, Maylam decided not to portray the triangular relationship between three men, as suggested in Wilde's novel, but to focus on Dorian's character and her heterosexual encounters with other men. Thereby,

Maylam avoided the theme of homosexuality in his adaptation.

### **3.4.1.3. Themes and Motifs**

Tony Maylam attempted to transport the story of *Dorian Gray* into the modern world by turning Dorian into a female model who has to struggle with the fear of being substituted by someone younger and therefore wishes to remain always young. Oscar Wilde's themes of youth and beauty are intensified by the new context in which Maylam puts the adaptation. The whole film focuses on the importance of beauty and ageing in the superficial world of fashion and thereby shows the timeless quality of Wilde's story, which proves that the novel is easily transferable to a modern context. In contrast to the novel, Dorian is not obsessed with her own picture but rather with herself, her eternal beauty and the perfection of her face. She covers her apartment with pictures of herself and is described as becoming a stranger to her friends. This is also the reason why in Tony Maylam's version of the story, the theme of the 'doppelgänger' is not as prominent as in other adaptations in which the audience often felt that the painting was Dorian's 'alter ego'. Rather than being 'part of herself', in this film, the 'picture' is a mirror of her actions.

In contrast to most adaptations analysed so far, Maylam decided not to focus on Dorian's moral decline as described in Wilde's book. Apart from her short-tempered character and the murders of Sofia Lord and Allen Campbell, Dorian is not seen to participate in an excessive lifestyle. The audience is only left to guess about any immoral behaviour from the narration of the voice-over. We see her drinking and hosting parties at her apartment but she is never seen entering the New York underworld. Arguably, Maylam decided to focus mainly on the theme of aestheticism and narcissism in his film, as those are the topics most relevant for the setting of the fashion world.

It is only towards the end of the film that Maylam focuses on the issue of the soul. While Dorian is more concerned with her outer appearance at the beginning, she feels haunted by her past during the second half of the film. The narrator of the film says that Dorian longed for her "unstained youth" (01:26:14) and that she would never again

“tempt innocence” (01:26:23). To redeem her soul Dorian travels to Africa and nurses children in a hospital, but ultimately realizes that despite her efforts she cannot be saved. While previous adaptations had shown a positive, hopeful change in the painting after Dorian attempted to do something good, Maylam’s outlook is rather pessimistic.

#### 3.4.1.4. Transtextuality

*The Sins of Dorian Gray* uses various media to create transtextual relationships. On the one hand, the film uses Oscar Wilde’s original epigrams, in altered form, meaning they have been shortened or used in a different context. This includes various conversations between characters, which have been adapted from Wilde’s novel, as well as the text of the voice-over. An example for this is the narration at the end of the film, in which Henry Lord states,

Dorian had tried to kill the past, her terrible soul life. Now, without its hideous warning, she was at peace. It was not until they examined the rings on her fingers that they recognized who it was. (01:32:27-01:32:37)

The last sentence in particular refers to the final page in the novel, in which Wilde describes, “[i]t was not till they had examined the rings that they recognized who it was” (DG 194). On the other hand, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is referred to through the screen test for a *Dorian Gray* film. Dorian watches a short video that had been made for a *Dorian Gray* film (00:07:11). In the scene on the tape, Dorian poses for a painter, similar to Oscar Wilde’s Dorian as he posed for Basil. Additionally, the film features a theme song named ‘*The Sins of Dorian Gray*’, which is performed by Lisa DalBello. The lyrics of the song narrate the story of ‘Dorian Gray’ in a way that could refer to Oscar Wilde’s novel as well as to the film. The opening of the song mentions “a wish [had] come true” (00:02:39) and continues: “by mirrors of the mind, reflecting pictures of the soul” (00:02:50). The song is used at the beginning, the middle and the end of the film to reinforce its connection with its literary source. Maylam probably used the song to make a transtextual reference to both.

Further, transtextual references are made through, for example, the use of

popular fashion magazines. At the beginning of the film, we see numerous framed covers from magazines like *Harper's Bazaar*, *Life*, *Elle* and *Time*, all of which feature Dorian. Regarding the prestige of those magazines it is likely that Maylam used them to promote Dorian's status as a high fashion model in the film and to stress the link with the fashion world early on in the film.

### **3.4.2. *Dorian Gray im Spiegel der Boulevardpresse* (1984)**

#### ***(The Mirror Image of Dorian Gray in the Yellow Press)***

Ulrike Ottinger's film is probably the most radical filmic transformation of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. One can even go so far as to argue that the film did not adapt the novel but only elements of Wilde's original story. Tanitch claims that the film "owed more to J J Huysman's *À Rebours* than it did to Wilde" (392). However, many parallels can be found between Ottinger's film and Wilde's novel, especially concerning main themes and the plot during the first half of the movie.

In Ottinger's version, Dorian Gray is a beautiful young man whose private life is used by the media in order for them to produce new stories. As in *The Sins of Dorian Gray*, Dorian is played by a woman, Veruschka von Lehndorff, although in this adaptation, this fact is not openly addressed. Despite the fact that an actress takes over the part of Dorian Gray, she is always dressed in men's clothes and not a single time referred to as a woman. Apart from Dorian Gray, the film features Delphine Seyrig as Dr. Mabuse and Tabea Blumenschein as Andamana. Regarding the change of characters' names and the altered title, the audience naturally expects Ulrike Ottinger's version to be a radical translation of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

#### **3.4.2.1. Story**

The story centres around Dorian Gray, a "beautiful and somewhat dull inexperienced young man" (00:09:58), who is chosen by Dr. Mabuse to be the new subject of the yellow press. Dr. Mabuse is the head of a publishing group who decides to create her

own stories instead of printing the stories of others. Without Dorian's knowledge they plan to "build him up, seduce him, annihilate him" (00:10:15) and to have his life be "thoroughly exploited by [the] media's stories and pictures" (00:10:22). Mabuse intends to "let [Dorian] experience everything [their] readers don't dare to dream of" (00:10:36) and to publish a "kind of serialized novel which will be directed step by step" (00:10:43).

Dorian Gray lost his parents while he was still little and he now lives in a house with 'Hollywood', his servant and friend, who plans his daily schedule and who is "like a mother and a father" (00:16:41) to him. Dr. Mabuse invites Dorian to the première of a modern opera called *Happy Prince*, where he falls in love with the lead singer, Andamana. Their romance is used by Dr. Mabuse to sell her stories to the media. Despite Dorian's desire to spend all his time with Andamana, Dr. Mabuse persuades him to explore the underworld with him. Tired of his boring life, Dorian agrees and claims that he is "ready to descend into the underworld" (01:09:46).

When pictures of Dorian's debauchery are published in the newspaper, he realizes that the press only uses him and decides to turn against Dr. Mabuse. Dr. Spiegelwelt, a member of Mabuse's team, gives Dorian a picture that proves that Dr. Mabuse planned the whole story around him and used him like a puppet. The next morning, Dorian reads the headlines of the local newspaper: "Andamana dead. Prop man mistook real knife for trick knife" (02:04:36). Dorian thinks that everything was a part of Mabuse's plan and fears that he might be the next one in line: "Yesterday the little doctor. Last night Andamana. Tomorrow, maybe me" (02:08:30). He decides to drive to Mabuse's dungeon and face her and her consultants. Dorian takes out a knife and kills not only Mabuse but everyone else in the room as well; a blood bath follows (02:13:27).

Surprisingly, in the next scene the audience sees the funeral of Dorian Gray. Dr. Mabuse and all her consultants are present when Dorian appears in a red car and runs everyone over. The headline of following day's newspaper reads: "Dorian Gray, his death in detail" (02:22:10). Dorian Gray lies in his bed, newspaper in his hand and a cold, decisive look on his face. He instructs Hollywood: "Stop everything. We have new headlines, more sensational than the old. Bring me the negative and another cup of chocolate. I want to dictate the end of the story" (02:22:22-02:22:40).

### 3.4.2.2. Characters and Structure

Ulrike Ottinger's version has little in common with the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* concerning characters and structure. Ottinger completely made it into a work of her own, resembling a work of art rather than a film. However, certain traits of the original story have been maintained. The protagonist, for example, is still named Dorian Gray. Instead of Henry Wotton and Basil Hallward, Ottinger introduces the character of Dr. Mabuse. She is painter and seducer in one. She creates the 'picture of Dorian Gray' for the press and at the same time leads him into debauchery in order to increase newspaper sales. In contrast to the novel, she is not fascinated by Dorian, she merely sees in him a beautiful person who is naïve enough to be used for her evil purposes.

Ulrike Ottinger also included a version of Sybil Vane in her adaptation, in the form of the opera singer Andamana. Quite similar to Dorian's falling in love with Sybil, Ottinger's Dorian falls for the beautiful actress. Unlike in the novel though, he does not reject her. Their love survives Mabuse's intrigues and only comes to an end when Andamana is accidentally killed on stage. Her death resembles Sybil Vane's, as she also died a theatrical death on stage.

The structure of Ottinger's film is difficult to analyse. Most scenes fade into each other without any indication of the time and place; the events are often so bizarre that the audience easily loses track of what is actually happening. Alice A. Kuzniar describes the structure of the film as an "episodic, even incoherent series of events" (156). Besides, Ottinger does not provide any information about how much time passes in the film.

### 3.4.2.3. Themes and Motifs

Narcissism is one of the central themes in Ottinger's adaptation. At the beginning, Dr. Mabuse claims that it is due to Dorian's "inexperience and above all, his narcissism" which will make him cooperate with them. Moreover, she calls her mission "operation mirror" (00:12:00), to put a further focus on his reflection, not only in the sense of how

Dorian sees himself, but also in the sense of how the public will perceive his 'image'. The theme of narcissism is therefore also linked to the theme of the 'doppelgänger' because Dr. Mabuse uses Dorian's 'pictures' to create his 'other self'. Dorian as viewed by the media and Dorian as a private person are thereby two parts of Dorian's personality. However, unlike previous adaptations and in contrast to the novel, Dorian does not have an obsessive relationship with his 'picture'. For one, this is because Ottinger's Dorian does not actively pursue an excessive lifestyle. His actions as shown in the media's images of him are almost always perfectly staged by Dr. Mabuse. Therefore there is also no moral downfall and Dorian does not exchange his soul for eternal beauty.

Despite the lack of a Henry Wotton in this version, the adaptation does not cease to include Wilde's themes of hedonism and aestheticism. Ottinger introduces them in the film partly by referring to them in Dorian's daily study schedule: "11 a.m. – Hegelian Aesthetics and its influence. For advanced students" (00:15:48). Besides, she uses Dr. Mabuse as a spokesperson to introduce Dorian to hedonistic values and principles. For example she states that she and her company would "let [Dorian] experience everything [their] readers don't dare to dream of" (00:10:36). Mabuse takes Dorian literally 'to the underground' and introduces him to the strangest types of food and drink, makes him watch scenes of physical and mental abuse, sex, homosexuality and brutal violence.

A further important theme in this film is the importance of power and influence the press and media have in today's society. The film focuses on how stories are created and sold to increase sales number. Dorian questions the influence of the press, namely that "entertainment is everything" (00:46:23) and if this is a positive development or solely profit oriented business. The film mocks journalism at the time of the 1980s as the most 'important' aspects of are introduced: "Independence, Non-Partisanship, Objectivity", to which Mabuse only replies: "I thought they've been retired?" (01:51:43). The theme of the press is also linked to hedonism, since in this film the media are portrayed to care only for superficial beauty while constantly seeking new experiences and pleasures, as Lord Henry suggested in the novel.

What is more, Ottinger plays with the trope of "gender-switching" (Kuzniar 141).

Although Dorian is referred to as male in the film, he is played by a woman, the “1960s androgynous-looking model, Veruschka von Lehndorff” (141). However, the fact that Dorian is a woman, is never mentioned nor questioned throughout the film. In *The Queer German Cinema*, Alice A. Kuzniar argues that because Dorian Gray is played by a woman who falls in love with the actress Andamana, the film could stand for “impl[ie]d queer sexuality” (146). Further, Kuzniar claims, Dorian could be regarded as a homosexual character, who “leads an effeminate, dandyish lifestyle” (150). Compared to Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* one could argue that while Wilde portrayed a love triangle between three men (Basil, Dorian, Henry), Ottinger portrays a triangular relationship between three women (Dr. Mabuse, Dorian, Andamana). She uses this relationship to portray female homosexuality in her film in a subtle way.

#### **3.4.2.4. Transtextuality**

Ulrike Ottinger’s films are known for frequent use of allegories and transtextual references and her adaptation *The Mirror Image of Dorian Gray in the Yellow Press* is a case point.

On the transtextual level the film is linked to its source text *The Picture of Dorian Gray* through the altered title and the names of characters. Besides, as stated above, Ottinger uses Wilde’s original aphorisms and bases her film on the central themes of the novel. A further reference to Oscar Wilde is achieved through naming the opera in the film *The Happy Prince*, which is also the title of a story by Wilde that was published in 1888. In the opera in Ottinger’s adaptation, Dorian plays the role of the ‘Happy Prince’ but the contents of the opera are not related to Wilde’s original story. The opera centres around the Spanish conquest of America to reflect symbolically on Dorian’s actions and the plot in general. For example, it shows how Dorian, as the ‘Happy Prince’, falls in love with Andamana, who belongs to a native tribe. In this context, Dr. Mabuse appears in the dress of the Pope and tries to convince Dorian to abandon his relationship and conquer the land. Kuzniar argues that the characters in this “side-show” resemble “marionettes in a puppet theatre [...] their movements are awkward, wooden, and consciously staged”

(145). According to Kuzniar, these ‘side-show actors’ mirror how Dorian is “on display for the tabloid spies and photographers. [He is] like an ornament or marionette, Dorian attracts the gaze” (146).

In her adaptation, Ulrike Ottinger decided to exchange Wilde’s Lord Henry Wotton for Dr. Mabuse. Interestingly, Ottinger did not invent this character but adapted it from what David Kalat calls the “Dr. Mabuse ‘canon’” (1). This ‘canon’ consists of one novel and several films, release between 1922 and 1970, which all centre around this particular character<sup>26</sup>. Originally, the character of Dr. Mabuse was invented by Norbert Jaques (Kalat 14) and depicts an evil character who plays with human lives and who commits crimes. Ulrike Ottinger chose Dr. Mabuse not only to add a strong ‘mephistotelian’ character to her film, in the sense that she plays with Dorian and tries to seduce him. This choice also provided her with a range of transtextual references between her adaptation and the Mabuse canon. One example for this would be the press ball to which she invites Dorian, at the beginning of the film. This scene is referring to Norbert Jaques’ short story *Dr. Mabuse auf dem Presseball*.

### **3.4.3. *Pact with the Devil* (2004)**

Allan A. Goldstein decided to transfer the original story by Oscar Wilde to 1980 New York. The adaptation tried to follow in the footsteps of *The Sins of Dorian Gray* by selecting the New York fashion scene and telling Wilde’s story from a modern viewpoint. *Pact with the Devil*, as the title already suggests, concentrates on the bargain with the devil and the sexual and violent excesses along the way. The film features Ethan Erickson as Louis/Dorian and Malcolm McDowell as Henry Wooten.

It can be argued that Allen A. Goldstein’s version of the selling of one’s soul in return for eternal youth failed to convince its audience. Compared to the other eight films analysed in this thesis, Goldstein’s film even proved to be the least popular, since it was

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<sup>26</sup> Kalat states that the core of the ‘Mabuse canon’ consists of the following works: *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler* (1922), *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* (1932), *The 1000 Eyes of Dr. Mabuse* (1960), *The Return of Dr. Mabuse* (1961), *The Invisible Dr. Mabuse* (1962), *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* (1962), *Scotland Yard vs. Dr. Mabuse* (1963), *The Death Ray of Dr. Mabuse* (1964) and *The Vengeance of Dr. Mabuse* (1970) (1).

only rated 3.9 (out of 10) on the *Internet Movie Database*<sup>27</sup>. Additionally, most reviewers regarded the film as a bad adaptation of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and argue that Goldstein's version "alters the story in ways that become nonsensical" (IMDB s.v. "Dorian 2004") and further call the film a "misguided attempt to retell something that was better done before" (s.v. "Dorian 2004").

### 3.4.3.1. Story

Henry Wooten, a manager, narrates the story of Bae, an ascending fashion photographer, and Louis, a simple worker who is discovered by Henry to become a model. Wooten persuades Louis to become the new face of the 'Savage' fragrance and promises to turn him into a "worldclass supermodel" (00:12:25). Henry Wooten celebrates the new face of 'Savage' by giving Louis a framed photograph of himself. Henry tells Dorian the story of Dorian Gray, the protagonist of Oscar Wilde's novel, who wished his portrait to carry the burden of his doings while he always remained young. Louis calls this the "pact with the devil"<sup>28</sup> (00:16:09). Henry suggests that his new professional name should be 'Dorian Gray'. The following night Louis decides to make a pact with the devil, that he would sell his soul in return for eternal youth. He 'signs the contract' by writing "Dorian" on his mirror in blood (00:19:48).

Dorian's relationship with his fiancée Sybil suffers enormously under the growing influence of Henry and his new friends. As Dorian is invited to join a party at Henry's house, Sybil overdoses on heroin. When Dorian learns that Sybil is dead, he recognizes that his photograph has changed (00:33:54). It shows the first signs of ageing and Dorian decides to hide it behind a mirror.

Ten years pass and in the meantime, as Henry narrates, Dorian becomes a successful model. People had begun to talk about Dorian's escapades, his quickly

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<sup>27</sup> Regarding all adaptations in this thesis, the rating (following IMDB, since other platforms [e.g. *Rotten Tomatoes*] did not provide ratings for all films analysed in this thesis) would be as follows:

1. Albert Lewin (1945)	7.6	4. Oliver Parker (2009)	6.2	7. Massimo Dallamano (1969)	5.8
2. John Gorrie (1976)	7.1	5. Tony Maylam (1983)	5.9	8. David Rosenbaum (2004)	4.3
3. Glenn Jordan (1973)	6.2	6. Ulrike Ottinger (1984)	5.9	9. Allen A. Goldstein (2004)	3.9

<sup>28</sup> Louis' statement is directly linked to the actual title of the film *Dorian - Pact with the Devil*.

changing relationships with women, drug issues and his growing irresponsibility towards his modelling job. As Henry admonishes Dorian to rethink his lifestyle, Dorian decides to show him the photograph (00:38:50), but instead of being shocked, Henry is fascinated by it, saying that he can “believe anything, providing it’s truly incredible” (00:39:25). Another ten years later, at a party for Bae, Dorian appears again after he spent years exploring all kinds of debauchery (01:04:12). He still looks unchanged and makes everyone wonder how he managed to stay so young. Dorian asks Bae to give him all the pictures she ever made of him. He is seen destroying all the pictures, burning them, cutting them, and pouring acid over them. The only picture he does not dare to destroy is the cursed photograph.

In a final showdown Henry reveals that as soon as Dorian’s portrait is destroyed, he will die. The pact between them will go on forever and ever. Terrified by the thought and disgusted by his painting Dorian takes a knife and destroys his picture, and while the picture returns to its former state, Dorian is seen changing to what the photograph looked like, the mirror of his actions (01:18:20).

### **3.4.3.2. Characters and Structure**

For his adaptation, Allen A. Goldstein did not only change Wilde’s original story but also the characters’ names. The protagonist, Louis, is only called ‘Dorian’ after he decides to become a model. Besides, Lord Henry Wotton is changed to Henry Wooten and Basil Hallward is represented by Bae, the photographer who takes Dorian’s pictures. It is only the name of Sybil which is maintained in the film. Her role, however, is almost insignificant. Presented as Dorian’s fiancée, the audience neither learns how they met nor what their relationship looks like. Scenes which deal more extensively with the young couple are already indicating the end of their relationship. Furthermore, Sybil’s death does not have a significant impact on the plot. It merely seems to be the last barrier between Dorian and Henry’s growing influence over him.

Also, two additional characters appear in Goldstein’s film, namely Mariella and Rolf Steiner, a rich couple who invite Dorian to come with them to Bavaria. Ultimately

though, Rolf finds out that Dorian has an affair with his wife and that she fell in love with the beautiful Adonis and attempts to shoot Dorian. They have a fight in which Dorian accidentally shoots Ralf. His wife finds out about Dorian's true self in the photograph and flees but ends up falling down the stairs, also dying. By adding the death of these two characters to the film, Goldstein elaborates on Dorian's moral downfall and makes the burden his soul has to carry even more gruesome.

The photographer Bae in the film has the same function as Basil in the novel. She takes the photograph which carries Dorian's curse and tries to act as Dorian's conscience, constantly reminding him of what is good and what is evil. Her name was probably meant to be an abbreviated version of the name 'Basil'. It is only in the end that the audience learns that it was not Bae but Henry who took the fateful picture of Dorian. Goldstein also uses Bae to add a romantic strand to the plot since he includes a relationship between her and Dorian in the second half of the film.

Concerning the film's structure it can be said that Goldstein decided to narrate his story predominantly through flashbacks, therefore breaking with the linear structure of Oscar Wilde's novel. The film begins with the police investigating Dorian's death and Henry explains how he had met Louis and what happened during the last twenty years. Henry Wooten narrates the film through voice-over.

#### **3.4.3.3. Themes and Motifs**

In this version Henry Wooten takes over the role of the devil and thereby stresses the theme of the 'pact with the devil' in the film. He makes the pact with Louis, who wishes to remain young like Oscar Wilde's Dorian Gray. Henry's presence appears to be haunting most scenes, from the beginning of the film. He is constantly watching everything that happens, observing characters, taking their pictures. He sees everything, knows everything and also decides about life and death. This becomes obvious as he watches Sybil die from the overdose or when he looks at Dorian after he kills Ralf. Whenever Dorian wants to return to an ordinary life, Henry is in the way, bringing Dorian back on the path that he intended for him. Henry does not allow Dorian to break the pact. He

regards him as his “work of art” (00:49:39). He urges Dorian to live his life, to use the gift of youth, which has been given to him, claiming that “there are no limits” (00:39:43). Bae tells Dorian that Henry is “hunting forever” (01:11:54) for souls and further reveals that she also traded her soul, in return for her art. In addition to his role as the devil, Henry Wooten eloquently manages to bring across the themes of hedonism that Oscar Wilde’s character Lord Henry Wotton articulated throughout the novel. Wooten says that “one’s aim in life should be self-development, realizing one’s potential to the maximum” (00:07:21). Moreover he argues that “beauty is a form of genius” (00:11:52).

Goldstein also decided to stress the relationship between Dorian and his ‘doppelgänger’. Throughout the film, Dorian develops a downright obsession with his own reflection, not only towards the photograph but also with regard to his mirror image in general. This becomes obvious when Dorian ‘signs the contract’ to stay young for forever by writing his name on a mirror in blood, and also at the end of the film when he destroys all photographs of him. Concerning the ‘picture’, Dorian has the compulsive urge to take the photograph with him wherever he goes, he never leaves his ‘picture’ behind and fully accepts it as a part of himself. Even more so, Dorian claims that the picture “*is him*” (00:47:54).

Despite the fact that Goldstein explicitly portrayed Dorian’s immoral and debauchorous lifestyle and his excessive sexual pleasures in particular, the film does not take up the theme of homosexuality. Goldstein decided rather to focus on Dorian’s heterosexual relationships, especially with Bae.

#### **3.4.3.4. Transtextuality**

Goldstein predominantly makes references to two source ‘texts’. On the one hand the director bases his film on Oscar Wilde’s novel, despite changing the title of his adaptation in a way that the original source is not immediately obvious. However, he establishes a direct link between his work and its literary parent by actually having Henry tell Louis the story about Dorian Gray (00:16:00). This transtextual connection also serves as the director’s tribute to the source text. Further, he decides to keep the main

characters' names (Henry, Dorian) and include the main themes of the novel like hedonism, aestheticism and the reference to the 'pact with the devil'. Additionally, Goldstein uses Henry in his role of the devil, who frequently uses the aphorisms of Oscar Wilde.

On the other hand Goldstein adapts Tony Maylam's *The Sins of Dorian Gray* and transfers the story of Wilde's novel to the New York fashion scene. In both films, Dorian is a model that is seduced and dominated by the character of Henry. While in Maylam's film, Dorian is female and a model for the cosmetic brand 'Mystique', Goldstein's Dorian is the new face for the fragrance 'Savage'. Besides, in both versions the 'picture' of Dorian Gray is no longer a painting but is represented through other forms of media like a screen test or a photograph. The fact that Goldstein uses Bae as a photographer in his adaptation, who takes 'pictures' for a book about Dorian Gray, can be understood as a reference not only to the 'picture' of Dorian Gray but also as an transtextual reference to the book *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

#### **3.4.4. Summary**

In the three radical adaptations discussed above, the filmmakers' interpretation of the source text was realized freely on the screen. By choosing to turn their films into radical translations, the directors had the possibilities to adapt Wilde's story according to their own interpretation. Crucial changes were made to setting, characters and plot of the original story. In certain adaptations, as for example the version by Ulrike Ottinger, the plot has been altered in a way that the audience has difficulties in recognizing the transtextual relationship with Oscar Wilde's work. Radical translations often require a certain previous knowledge in order for the audience to understand the link that it creates with its literary parent. Further, filmmakers enrich the adaptation with numerous transtextual references, which put the focus away from Oscar Wilde's story and which make the central themes more easily understandable for a modern audience.

Radical translations of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* show the tendency to focus on the aspect of youth and beauty more extensively than other

adaptations analysed above. Directors like Tony Maylam or Allan A. Goldstein, for example, decided to change the setting for the story from Victorian London to the fashion scene of New York. The theme of hedonism and the appreciation of beautiful things is reduced to the superficial beauty of one's outer appearance, reflecting the obsession with eternal youth and beauty in modern times. Both filmmakers attempted to show the timelessness of Wilde's story. In contrast, Ulrike Ottinger used the novel only as one of many influences for her film. As stated previously, her version of *Dorian Gray* goes beyond 'adapting' Oscar Wilde's story, she rather creates a 'work of art' that refers to numerous sources.

Overall, these adaptations did not fully convince cinema audiences or reviewers. Compared to the ratings of literal and traditional versions above, only Ulrike Ottinger's film can be regarded as successful. Tony Maylam's and Allan A. Goldstein's adaptations in particular, both released in 2004, achieved only poor results. Whereas for example Albert Lewin's film was rated 7.6 points on the *Internet Movie Database*, Goldstein's *Pact With the Devil* gained only 3.9, the lowest rating for any film adaptation of *Dorian Gray*. A reason for this might be that a radical translation, with its free interpretation of the source text, runs a greater risk of disappointing audience expectations than literal or traditional approaches and naturally divides audiences and critics.

## B. Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to analyse how Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was adapted for the medium of film. Nine films were chosen, providing a representative selection of the adaptation history of *Dorian Gray* from 1945 to 2009. These adaptations reflect the continuous fascination with the story about eternal youth and beauty. The films were divided into three translation modes: literal, traditional, radical and then analysed further according to the theoretical framework including the source novel's plot, characters and themes, as outlined in Sections 1 and 2. Based on this, the aim was to show if and how Oscar Wilde's work has been successfully turned into a feature film and what kind of changes need to be made to the source text in order to achieve this.

By dividing the films into literal, traditional and radical translations, it was not only possible to investigate which translation modes directors chose over the last sixty-five years but also to draw conclusions concerning how various adaptations which belong to the same category might differ from, or be similar to, each other. It can be argued that literal versions of Wilde's novel are restricted to earlier adaptations (1945, 1973 and 1976) while more recently, most directors have indicated a development towards traditional and radical ways of adaptation. A reason for this appears to be the desire to modernize the original story to make it accessible for a modern audience. However, the examination of films has shown that most filmmakers struggle immensely not only to adapt Oscar Wilde's novel by transforming its ideas and themes to the medium of film but also to create a work of their own which is well received by audiences. Despite the tendency to produce films which abandon fidelity to their source text, this thesis has shown that the less faithful a film stayed towards Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the less successful it was concerning audience reactions. The films retaining Wilde's text faithfully and enriching it with a range of elaborate filmmaking skills (e.g. Albert Lewin, John Osborne) proved to evoke more positive reactions than the films by, for example, Massimo Dallamano, David Rosenbaum or Allan A. Goldstein. The problems most of these filmmakers faced are listed by Kirsten von Hagen, who claims

that

most directors fell in love not with the novel, but with their solution to the problem of its cinematic representation, thereby losing the gift for capturing the essence of complex literature. [...] The films explore neither the disconcerting poetry nor the philosophic dimension. (115)

Therefore it can be said that the main difficulties directors faced with the novel were based on the accurate transformation of not only the surface level of the book, but also more complex structures, which lie deep within the text, namely the themes of eternal youth, hedonism, good versus evil and homosexuality.

One of the questions that frequently recur in the context of Oscar Wilde's work is that of implied homoeroticism. As regards the filmic transformations of his novel it can be concluded that while literal translations rarely included instances of homosexuality (and if so, only in a very subtle way), most traditional and radical adaptations deal openly with this topic. Especially the films of Massimo Dallamano, Allan A. Goldstein and Oliver Parker present the audience with more or less explicit homosexual scenes and they use an open approach towards sexuality in general. The reason for this is that the directors needed to elaborate visually on the debaucheries mentioned in the novel in order to make an audience of the 1980s or 2000s perceive his actions as immoral.

To summarize, it can be said that Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* has seen many different filmic realizations, ranging from literal, to traditional, to radical translations – with different degrees of success. Nine adaptations have been at the centre of this paper, however, this thesis can only be seen as an impulse for future researchers. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* has inspired many filmmakers and it will certainly not fail to continue to do so in the future.

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## D. Deutsche Zusammenfassung

### “Die filmischen Adaptionen von Oscar Wildes *Das Bildnis des Dorian Gray*”

Oscar Wilde war einer der umstrittensten Schriftsteller im viktorianischen England. Vor allem seine eigene Person war Zielscheibe zahlreicher Anschuldigungen, ausgelöst durch seinen ausschweifenden Lebensstil und seine homosexuellen Beziehungen zu jungen Männern. Eines seiner Werke spielte eine besonders große Rolle bei der Frage nach dem moralischen Wert von Wildes literarischem Schaffen: *Das Bildnis des Dorian Gray*. Bereits bei seiner Veröffentlichung 1890 löste es reges Entsetzen unter seiner Leserschaft aus. Die Frage, inwiefern der einzige Roman Wildes in Zusammenhang mit seiner persönlichen Einstellung zu Moral stand, war auch der Inhalt eines Gerichtsverfahrens in Zuge dessen Oscar Wilde zu zwei Jahren Zuchthaus verurteilt wurde.

Mehr als 110 Jahre nach Wildes Tod inspiriert sein literarisches Erbe immer noch die Massen. Insbesondere *Das Bildnis des Dorian Gray* dient kontinuierlich als Vorlage zahlreicher Theaterstücke und Filme. Bis zum heutigen Tag wurde Oscar Wildes einziger Roman dreiundzwanzig Mal verfilmt, wobei jeder Regisseur seinen eigenen Standpunkt gegenüber der zeitlosen Geschichte um den niemals alternden Dorian Gray einnimmt. Unter diesem Aspekt hat es sich diese Arbeit zur Aufgabe gemacht, die Beziehung zwischen dem Roman *Das Bildnis des Dorian Gray* und seinen Filmadaptionen zu analysieren. Für den Zweck dieser Analyse konzentriert sich die Arbeit auf neun Filme, beginnend mit dem ersten Tonfilm von 1945 bis hin zur momentan aktuellsten Adaption aus dem Jahr 2009. Dabei wird nicht nur ein besonderes Augenmerk auf das Verhältnis der Filme zu Wildes Werk sondern auch die Verbindung zwischen den Adaptionen gelegt.

Die Grundlage für die Adoptionsanalyse bilden vor allem die Definitionen von Linda Costanzo Cahir, Linda Hutcheon, James M. Welsh und Gerard Génette. Diese dienen nicht nur der Kategorisierung der Adaptionen in ‚wörtliche‘, ‚traditionelle‘ und ‚radikale‘ ‚Übersetzung‘, sondern auch der Erläuterung der thematischen und intertextuellen Zusammenhänge zwischen der Vorlage und den Filmen. Im analytischen

Teil der Arbeit wird aufgezeigt, wie die Regisseure den Roman für die Leinwand umsetzten, insbesondere in Bezug auf Handlung, Charaktere, Intertextualität und die Umsetzung der im Roman dominierenden Leit motive. Ein weiterer Fokus wird darauf gelegt, welche Änderungen die Filmemacher an dem Quelltext vornahmen. Dabei stellt sich heraus, dass vor allem jene Filme, die der literarischen Vorlage treu geblieben sind, sehr positive Reaktionen hervorrufen, wohingegen radikale Adaptionen im Allgemeinen eher daran scheitern, die Zuseher zu überzeugen. Des Weiteren ist festzustellen, dass Filmemacher dazu tendieren, nicht nur Oscar Wildes Roman zu adaptieren, sondern auch Veränderungsstrategien früherer Regisseure zu übernehmen, beispielsweise in Bezug auf den Handlungsverlauf des Films und die Darstellung der Charaktere.

## **Curriculum Vitae**

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