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Wilde Monsters: The Creation of Aesthete Criminals

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WILDE MONSTERS: THE CREATION OF AESTHETE
CRIMINALS

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
English

by
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Accepted by:
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ABSTRACT

In the preface to Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde remarks that "it is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors" (2). Wilde complicates this mirroring in his novel, for Dorian's portrait reflects its subject through its decay. Furthermore, Dorian also reflects the painting through his immortality. In such state, Dorian, his crimes, and his art become unified. The idea that art reflects its spectators, however, hardly ends with Dorian. Both Wilde's novel and his short story "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime" prove reflective of the Victorian society and their fascination with both art and crime. More specifically, Wilde utilizes the concept of phrenology—the belief that criminals could be identified by physical attributes—to illustrate how his criminals are either the result Aesthetic pursuits or the result social influence. This juxtaposition of phrenology, art, and crime allows Wilde to voice his criticism on Aestheticism itself. His exploration of the movement in both texts suggests that Aestheticism inevitably becomes crime through the conflict between morality and indulgence, and he purports the value of inaction when seeking to avoid such moral decay.

This decay is best studied through the treatment of the physical bodies within both texts, for both crime and art manifest themselves on the bodies of the criminals. As such, this thesis examines Wilde's characters through the lens of contemporary body theory. The writings of Elizabeth Grosz, Judith Butler, and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson provide insight into how the Victorian society inscribes bodies through social influence. A close examination of Wilde's texts reveal how marked bodies were viewed as monstrous in the context of this society, but abstaining from desire on behalf of social norms results in an

equally monstrous division between body and mind. Though such abstinence acts as a solution to the inevitable descent of indulgence into criminal behavior, it is also an insincere and unnatural solution because of how it fractures the individual. In such state, Wilde's protagonists cannot completely escape their monstrous nature; either they become monsters through their indulgences in Aestheticism, or they become monstrous because their abstinence alters them.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family, both those who are still here and those who watch from the stars. They had faith in me when I doubted myself, saw potential in me when I could not find it myself, and supported me when I could not stand by myself.

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WILDE MONSTERS: THE CREATION OF AESTHETE CRIMINALS

In the preface to Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde remarks that "it is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors" (2). Wilde complicates this mirroring in his novel, for Dorian's crimes manifest themselves through his likeness in a painting. The painting does reflect its subject through its decay, but, moreover, its subject also reflects the painting through Dorian's immortality. As such, Dorian, his crimes, and his art become unified. The idea that art reflects its spectators, however, hardly ends with Dorian. Both Wilde's novel and his short story "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime" prove reflective of the Victorian society in general and, more specifically, the emergence of a fascination with both art and crime. Though these fascinations were not necessarily synonymous, Wilde blurs the lines between both items in his texts to provide the lens for his criticism on Aestheticism. His exploration of the movement in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime" suggests that art inevitably becomes crime through the conflict between morality and indulgence. This inevitable decay is best studied through the treatment of physical bodies in either text, for both crime and art manifest themselves on the criminals' bodies. Just as Dorian and his portrait become reflective of one another, so the crimes of Lord Arthur Savile manifest themselves on the lines of his palm. These manifestations often predict the act of crime itself, furthering the idea that the characters' descent into criminal behavior is inevitable. Moreover, the bodily inscriptions inflicted on both criminal and victim gesture towards a solution to the indulgence and crime conundrum. Wilde, through the use of his monsters, ultimately

purports the value of an individual's inaction—and a rejection of bodily experiences—when seeking to avoid the decay of indulgence into amoral behavior.

Originally published in late 1887, “Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime” proves to be a spiritual predecessor to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. It serves as Wilde’s initial attempt to illustrate how wanton indulgences in aestheticism result in corruption, and his publishing choices with *The Picture of Dorian Gray* provides the first proof of how these texts work to similar aims. In her own exploration of the original Lippencott manuscript, Elizabeth Lorang explores the significance of the other texts that Wilde’s novel appeared alongside. She finds particular fascination with

the appearance of Edward Heron-Allen’s article “The Chiromancy of To-Day” alongside *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in both the American and British editions of the magazine. Together, the pieces form a dialogue on the occult and the desire to know one’s soul via outer appearances. (Lorang 22)

Lorang’s interpretation allows for a conversation between Heron-Allen’s “The Chiromancy of To-Day” and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, for Wilde’s solitary novel depicts how Dorian values his soul based on superficial appearances. Lorang, however, does not mention how the presence of chiromancy in conjunction with *Dorian Gray* gestures back to the publication of “Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime,” in which chiromancy played a central role. Indeed, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* serves as an expansion of the original short story, and it enabled Wilde to “realize fully the [original] story’s aborted tragedy” (Cohen 106). Moreover, if *The Picture of Dorian Gray* works as an expansion of the earlier text, then the intertextuality enables modern audiences to decipher Dorian

Gray's portrait as a form of chiromancy. The marks on a canvas give insight into the character of Dorian Gray rather than marks on a palm. Therefore, the painting may be interpreted as an extension of Dorian Gray's corporeal form in that its markings prove reflective of his bodily experiences. Indeed, the artist Basil Hallward refers to Dorian's portrait as "the real Dorian," implying that the painting shares Dorian's corporeal form in a tangible, visual sense (*PoDG&OS* 37). Basil, then, acts as the chiromantist of the text, for he interprets Dorian's features and translates them into a very real extension of Dorian's body. The shared act of chiromancy at either story's outset, then, not only enables the two protagonists to be studied as similar individuals, but it also allows for an examination of the supporting characters as similar entities, as well. This intertextual exchange ultimately provides insight into the varying monstrous natures at play within either text.

In addition to understanding the intertextual nature of both texts, it is equally important to understand how the "monsters" are qualified as such. The traditional definition of "monster" deals with the physical: it is "a malformed animal or plant . . . [an] individual with a gross congenital malformation, usually of a degree incompatible with life" ("Monster"). Such a definition describes a physical "malformation" that has existed from birth and in some way impedes life itself. Moreover, the definition closely pairs animals with human beings; hence, monstrosity denotes a state closer to wilderness than society. Monstrosity becomes a natural state where man more closely reflects nature. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson discusses another definition from the Middle Ages, and this second definition involves "a showing forth of divine will . . . a disruption of the natural

order” (57). Here, a monstrous nature defies nature even as it “shows” or illustrates some divine will. From these definitions, it may be concluded that two varieties of monsters exist: those monsters that defer to nature to the point of impeding life, and those that disrupt nature in the name of complying with an omnipotent force. As Garland-Thomson suggests, the advent of the Victorian era saw a different treatment of monsters, for the monsters’ “power to inspire terror, awe, wonder, and divination was being eroded by science, which sought to classify and master rather than revere the extraordinary body” (57). Science, therefore, seeks mastery over the monstrous, and the necessity for mastery implies a monstrous nature that is previously uninhibited and wild. Criminals proved to be the wild monsters that Victorian society sought to master the most; as Drew Gray surmises, the “second half of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of the science of criminology and the attempt to understand criminal behavior” (168). This method of criminology implements the process of classification and mastery as proposed by Garland-Thomson. Moreover, it seeks to understand how the bodies of the criminals explain their behaviors, for Victorian criminology functioned on “the idea that a person’s physicality could provide insights into their mental and moral health” (171). The physical traits of a criminal act as a gross malformation within the societal mindset. This notion aligns most closely with the first definition of “monster,” for wanton criminals defer to nature to the point of disrupting the lives of their victims. An examination of both *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and “Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime” reveals that Wilde also saw the second definition of “monster” in his society. As such a reading will reveal, Lord Arthur Savile represents a monstrous man which defies nature and defers to an omnipresent

force (the “force” of society), and Dorian Gray serves as his opposite by representing a monster which defers to nature at the cost of life. These two forms of monsters in Victorian society serve as foils to one another, and only the congenital inscription of their bodies unifies them, regardless of whether their bodies are inscribed on a portrait or a palm.

In order to distinguish between the two forms of monsters, it is important to study the conditions under which society enables the creation of such monsters. Both Lord Arthur Savile and Dorian Gray experience varying forms of societal influence prior to their initiation into an epicurean pursuit of art and crime. Lord Arthur Savile’s initiation occurs through the art form of “chiromancy,” or palm-reading. On a literal level, Lord Arthur’s body is already inscribed by crime, and this “inscription” appears on the lines of his palm—a marking that has been present since his birth. This inscription requires a translation from an artist in order to be understood, and his involvement in social outings provides the opportunity for this translation. At Lady Windermere’s party, Lord Arthur watches Mr. Podgers read the palms of the others, and his observation fills him “with an immense curiosity to have his own hand read” (*PoDG&OS* 250). This curiosity stems primarily from a sense of danger from the readings. According to Wilde, “chiromancy was a most dangerous science, and one that ought not to be encouraged, except in a tete-a-tete” (250). The danger hardly presents any tangible danger beyond the notion of public humiliation via an embarrassing or tragic reading, but this comment establishes how the art form obtains societal worth from such danger. The risk contributes to its charm; the evasion of such public humiliation provides an opportunity for the participants to display

themselves as “normal” within their social spheres, and this sense of normalcy “designates the social figure through which people can represent themselves as human beings” (Garland-Thomson 8). Such a sense of normalcy as heralded by physical assessments links the body’s shape to mental and moral wholesomeness, and the assessment occurs solely as a social rather than natural construct. Anything worthy of public humiliation represents some social, physical, or potentially monstrous malformation that excludes the “monster” from a sense of being human.

The palm readings themselves further establish how the assessment of the body serves as an indication of social normalcy (or lack thereof). Mr. Podgers commands the attention of both the narrative and the party for several pages, and a depiction of his subjects’ identifying features precedes each palm reading. The Duchess, for example, has a “little fat hand with . . . short square fingers” whereas another subject possesses “a thick rugged hand, with a very long third finger” (248-49). Wilde never directly correlates these physical features to their significance in the palm reading itself, but the very aesthetic assessment of their features coupled with Mr. Podgers’s translation reflects the mindset of early nineteenth century criminology. During this time period, it was believed that “personality and behaviours could be understood by nihilat the cranial shape (phrenology)” (Gray 168). In a similar fashion to phrenology, Mr. Podgers analyzes the shape of his subjects’ hands and palms to assess their personality and future. This textual comparison between phrenology and chiromancy establishes a connection between art and crime, and it foreshadows the direction of the text as surely as the lines on Lord Arthur’s palms.

Ultimately, the sheer number of people having their palms read, coupled with his initial sensation of macabre curiosity, moves Arthur to have his palm read. This action relates to Elfenbein's discussion of chiromancy and social norms, for she argues that such conformity also serves "as a path to social success" (48). With society's judgment at stake, Lord Arthur has little choice but to participate, or he might appear as though he had something to hide from the party. His participation prevents speculation and displays his normalcy in the face of society. The art form of chiromancy, then, may not have had such a great concern if "aesthetic pursuits [were] set free from the taint of exercising or being the victim of coercive social power" (Goldstone 625). The intermingling of such "coercive social powers" with the appeal of the aesthetic pursuit of an art form provokes Lord Arthur into going through with the reading. This interest reflects, then, his concern for appearances or for the superficial; most importantly, it establishes his willingness to defer to the higher power of society. When Lord Arthur sees the danger of having his palm read, he submits to the social pressures applied to him and participates in the art of chiromancy. In doing so, he presents his body in order to have it classified by society, and he subjects himself to an assessment of "normalcy" determined by surface rather than content.

Upon succumbing to the societal influence, the palm reading becomes Lord Arthur's initiation not only to the world of crime but also to new experiences. Upon having his palm read, "for the first time in his life, [Lord Arthur] himself felt fear" (*PoDG&OS* 251). A similar sense of foreboding later would appear in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, but in this case the experience appears mutual for both subject and artist.

Mr. Podgers's "fat fingers grew cold and clammy," and "a shudder seemed to pass through him" upon viewing Lord Arthur's palm (251). Despite the shared experience of dread, Lord Arthur opts to finish the palm-reading with the assertion "tell me what you saw there . . . I am not a child" (254). This demand indicates a degree of influence, for it suggests that Mr. Podgers serves as an older man influencing a youth. Moreover, Wilde emphasizes the fact that Mr. Podgers is a *stranger* influencing the young protagonist, for Lord Arthur later wonders if it could be "written on his hand, in characters that he could not read himself, but that another could decipher . . . some blood-red sign of crime" (253). This underscores Lord Arthur's helplessness in the scope of the situation. The writing on his hand proves elusive to his own interpretation; his interpretation must stem from that of Mr. Podgers' art. This reflects Judith Butler's ideas about the nature of bodily inscriptions. She discusses how the body "often appears to be a passive medium that is signified by an inscription from a cultural source figured as 'external' to the body" (*GT* 129). In this case, the "inscriptions" themselves—the lines on Lord Arthur's palms—were present prior to being signified, and Mr. Podgers, as a cultural, external force, still assigns meaning to the inscriptions. Influence, then, becomes interchangeable with this process of signifying via external source; it occurs when an individual projects his interpretation of a body onto the body. This influence is never positive, for the skin "is systemically signified by taboos and anticipated transgressions" by society, as the exchange between Mr. Podgers and Lord Arthur indicates (131). Mr. Podgers translates the inscriptions on Lord Arthur's palm as being indicative of a future crime, implying that the bodily inscriptions reveal a monstrous interior. By subjecting himself to this

influence, Lord Arthur resigns his body to the role of a passive medium and accepts its “anticipated transgressions”. This marks the first step in the direction of what Cohen describes as Lord Arthur “unwittingly—witlessly— annihilate[ing] his own individuality” (105). The exchange implies that Lord Arthur cannot interpret the meaning of his own body and, by extension, his own identity without his society’s influence.

Dorian Gray undergoes a similar process through influence. He first learns about society from his interactions with two older men—Basil Hallward and Lord Henry Wotton. In fact, “the key term in [the novel] for the relation between the older men and the younger is influence,” and this influence becomes central to the plot from the first chapter (Elfenbein 498) After Basil describes his initial meetings with Dorian, Lord Henry insists on meeting Dorian, and he confirms Butler’s view of such “influence” by postulating that “there is no such thing as a good influence . . . All influence is immoral—immoral from the scientific point of view” (*PoDG&OS* 21). Already, this statement foreshadows that the forthcoming interactions between man and youth can only lead to the discovery of a monstrous inscription. The influence in this novel corrupts because of how the older men view it as a matter of indulgence, or an opportunity to engage in a pleasurable activity. After their initial meeting, Henry reflects on Dorian’s disposition, and he suggests that “there was a real joy in [the exercise of influence] perhaps the only satisfying joy left to us in an age . . . grossly carnal in its pleasures” (*PoDG&OS* 44). Influence, then, becomes a means of pleasure for the wielder of influence. This reveals how the cycle of influence and inscription perpetuates itself within society; the prospect of inscribing a translation onto a body, regardless of whether the body is classified as

“normal” or “monstrous,” conjures a rich sensation of pleasure. Society’s attempts to master the monstrous through classification ensure that the wielders of influence are unmarked bodies, for, as previously stated, such mastery drains the monstrous of its power. Indeed, Basil describes Lord Henry as “an extraordinary fellow . . . [who] never say[s] a moral thing, and . . . never do[es] a wrong thing” (12). The rift between saying and doing establishes how appearances have priority over the verbal; Lord Henry is not signified as a monster, therefore he does not act as one despite his amoral speech. His body is not marked by predicted crimes, granting him “status, privilege, and universality” (Garland-Thomson 130) This illustrates how an unmarked body (or a body that is not inscribed with future crimes) occupies a space of privilege and “normalcy” in society, enabling the unmarked body to wield additional influence and gain more pleasure.

As was the case with Lord Arthur, the prospect of influence creates a new experience for Dorian, who reflects that Henry’s words “had touched some secret chord that had never been touched before” (*PoDG&OS* 27). This sensation mirrors Lord Arthur’s feelings of fear upon being confronted by influence, for, like Lord Arthur’s fear, the “secret chord” presents Dorian with a novel experience. Similarly, the new sensations cause Dorian to become afraid of Lord Henry and, also, “ashamed of being afraid” (29). He acknowledges, with his shame, that he is on the verge of a significant experience and discovery, and so he fears the source of the influence more so than its result. Conversely, Lord Arthur feared the result (that of inescapable crime) more so than the inconspicuous Mr. Podgers. This distinction proves to be the first great difference between Wilde’s two monsters. Though Dorian does experience fear, he appreciates the “impressions or

experiences that are felt to possess an intrinsic significance”—impressions that were so fundamental to the practice of Aestheticism (Chai xi). He does rely on Lord Henry’s influence—and, by extension, the influence of aesthetic pursuits—to decipher the significance of his new experiences. As such, his body, too, serves as a passive medium, but his suspicion of the external, cultural force will eventually distinguish him from his counterpart Lord Arthur.

The older men use their influence to establish that Dorian’s worth stems from his youth and his beauty. This proves remarkably different from the influence of Mr. Podgers, who deciphers the contents of Lord Arthur’s palm to read the inscription of crime. In fact, neither Basil nor Lord Henry acknowledges the prospect of crime in Dorian’s physical form; they only express concern for his beauty to fulfill their own personal need for pleasure. Upon taking note of Dorian’s “finely-curved scarlet lips, his frank blue eyes, [and] his crisp gold hair,” Henry later remarks that “there is absolutely nothing in the world but youth” (*PoDG&OS* 24, 31). This testament causes Dorian to become concerned with his physical visage; it emphasizes the worth of beauty in his society and intimates the consequences of growing old. Most importantly, it causes Dorian to experience a Lacanian mirror-stage. He views Basil’s finished portrait of himself with new eyes, and it causes his cheeks to flush “for a moment with pleasure” (33). Henry’s interpretation of his youth enables Dorian to identify his own beauty and, in the words of Lacan, Dorian “assumes an image . . . [an] *imago*” as a result of this new interpretation (Lacan 1164). The outward reflection of the portrait, which also serves as Basil’s artistic interpretation of Dorian’s body, provides Dorian with a likeness of himself

and an understanding of how society views that likeness. In this case, as it was with Lord Arthur, Dorian requires external influence and interpretation to understand his own body and experiences. Dorian, however, comes to comprehend the worth of his appearance, and this comprehension provokes him to create his own bodily inscription—one that is inspired by but ultimately free of societal influence.

He accomplishes this by claiming his *imago* as his physical body rather than fleeing from the aesthetic interpretation of his corporeal body. This desire steps beyond Lacan's mirror stage to a more Aesthetic ideal in that Dorian, ultimately, strives to substitute life with art. This ideal lies at the core of Wilde's aestheticism; indeed, Pater and Wilde "both prefer the experience of art to the experience of life" (Cohen 111). If the body and the acknowledgement of the self serve as the path to experience, then Dorian strives to make this Aesthetic ideal literal. He invokes the power of the painting with nothing more than a simple exclamation: "if it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old!" (*PoDG&OS* 34). In this way, Dorian expresses how he wishes his *imago* would become a permanent fixture of his outward appearance. Beyond the simple, Aesthetic desire to experience art more so than life, Dorian's concern reflects a fear that life loses value without beauty and, more importantly, that *he* loses his value once he is no longer beautiful. This suggests that beauty, too, is socially desirable; beauty, especially in an Aesthete society, grants privilege and serves as an ideal. This sentiment begins what Pater, in his review of the novel, describes as Dorian's "unsuccessful experiment in epicureanism," or Dorian's wanton pursuit of pleasure through a beautiful life (Beckson 85). The reasoning behind the experiment's unsuccessful nature becomes

relevant later; for now, let us focus on the epicureanism itself. It demonstrates Dorian's unabashed obsession with the aesthetic and pleasurable. This passion also provides the framework for the unspoken deal he makes with the portrait, for Dorian promises to give "everything . . . [and] his soul for" the permanence of youth (*PoDG&OS* 34). Though no grinning Mephistopheles appears in the text to seal the deal, Wilde makes it clear that the deal comes to pass instantaneously. The change in Dorian's behavior proves palpable, for Dorian bemoans that he serves no purpose to Basil beyond being "a green bronze figure" for him (34). Here, the soul of the art becomes inseparable from the subject, and Dorian's soul and persona become inherently connected to the painting. Indeed, he exclaims that "the painting is part of me. I feel that" (35). Not only are the painting and subject inseparable, but there is a tangible link of shared experience forged between the two. In his desire to indulge ceaselessly in epicurean behaviors, Dorian permanently fuses his body with society's interpretation of his image. This substitution, however, will eventually enable Dorian to conceal his own bodily inscriptions from his society, and the painting itself will come to bear the burden of his monstrous nature.

Though Lord Arthur's palm does not necessarily provide him with a glimpse at his own reflection, the involvement of criminology and societal influence in the interpretation of his palm does allow for a simulacrum of an *imago*. The lines provide insight into his own reflection by society; Mr. Podgers validates his existence not as a figure of beauty but as a murderer. Unlike Dorian, however, Lord Arthur resists the reflection of himself that Aesthetic influence presents to him. As Cohen astutely points out, Lord Arthur's response to Mr. Podgers's interpretation is to turn away and exit the

party. This “symbolic turning frees him from evil and initiates his second life” (107). Though Cohen wisely interprets the significance of Lord Arthur’s departure, the eventual murder suggests that his “turning” was not solely responsible for Lord Arthur’s deliverance from evil. He may flee the scene of the party, but he ultimately accepts his role as a murderer, noting that its inscription on his body marks his crime as “Fate” (*PoDG&OS* 253). Lord Arthur’s turning, then, is an initial and incomplete rejection of the crime inscribed on his body. His second rejection occurs when he begins to plan the crime, for he decides to proceed on account of societal duty rather than personal indulgence. Upon studying the implications of his murder in conjunction with his love for Sybil Merton, his fiancé, Lord Arthur recognizes “where his duty [lies],” and he becomes “fully conscious of the fact that he had no right to marry until he had committed the murder” (259). Therefore, the crime inscribed on his body becomes no more than a matter of tedious duty or a chore. In his criticism of “Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime,” Ernest Newman recognizes this strange shift and remarks how “Lord Arthur has not the slightest compulsion about doing the murder, but feels very strongly about the dishonor involved in marrying an innocent girl before the wearisome business is completed” (Beckson 206). Their motivation presents a larger contrast between Wilde’s two monsters, for Lord Arthur acts receptive of his bodily experiences, yet he rejects his appreciation of them in the name of ethical and societal duty. In brief, he defies his nature in favor of adhering to societal norms. Such defiance develops his monstrous nature, and it provides the first indication of how Wilde will craft him into the second definition of monster through the duration of the story.

The progression of influence and experience for either character provides insight into why the characters opt to indulge in both art and crime, and it develops their physical and spiritual connection to the artists themselves. However, the behavior that results from this pattern of influence and experience proves most indicative of how an indulgence in personal, aesthetic desire ultimately results in corruption. For example, the method of Lord Arthur's murders, in particular, demonstrates how he maintains a close relation to aesthetic pursuits without entirely succumbing to his desires or relinquishing his duties towards his fiancé. In all but the last murder, Lord Arthur carefully considers aesthetics as secondary to social expectations during his plots to kill. His initial decision to procure a poison for Lady Clem is a consequence of his fear of causing scandal; he worries that Sibyl's father "might possibly object to the marriage if there was anything like a scandal," and, he decides, on the basis of social duties rather than aesthetics, to avoid a murder that could be traced back to him (*PoDG&OS* 262). Despite this unfaltering concern with duty, his methods of murder appeal not only to his aestheticism but also to that of his victims. With his attempted murder of Lady Clem, Lord Arthur knows of her heartburn, so he acquires a poisonous pill to give to her as a "cure." He takes into account the presentation of the pill, for he puts "the capsule into a pretty little silver *bonbonniere* . . . [and throws] away Pestle and Humbey's ugly pill-box" (263). This additional effort hardly amplifies the efficiency of Lord Arthur's plot, for he could have just as easily delivered the *bonbon* in its original packaging. The fancy box emphasizes his attention to aesthetics with regard to Lady Clem's death; even after she dies of perfectly natural causes, he preserves the box's art by allowing Sybil to have it, remarking that he "gave it

to poor Lady Clem [himself]" (268). This most dubious act of re-gifting, in a sense, demonstrates Lord Arthur's appreciation for the art employed in the act.

Even in his next attempted murder—that of the Dean of Chichester—Arthur again pays attention to the aesthetic desires of his target. He considers the Dean's "wonderful collection of timepieces" in his plot (269). The timepieces provide a pleasurable experience through the aesthetic pursuit of collecting them, so, as a result of this consideration, Arthur has a "pretty little French clock" crafted with a "round cake of dynamite" (272). The clock proves ineffective and again serves the role of a pretty gift, for Jane Percy later ponders in a note whether "Arthur would like one for a wedding present" (275). As such, Lord Arthur allows for some indulgences into Aestheticism, but his primary concern remains that of duty rather than self-indulgence. Even his forays into Aestheticism are done with the intent of indulging his would-be victims rather than furthering his own, personal experience. Crime remains a chore, and this represents how Lord Arthur defers to the expectations and desires of the society around him. Such deference creates a conflict between his own desires and his actions, and this later enables his monstrous nature to take form.

Dorian, conversely, seeks to fulfill the destiny that Lord Henry prescribes to him as a matter of self-indulgence. Prior to Dorian substituting his portrait for himself, Henry predicts a future of "a new Hedonism" for Dorian, of which he "might be a visible symbol" (31). In other words, Lord Henry foresees a future in which Dorian might exert influence over society and influence others, as well. This prediction is rather striking in its difference from Mr. Podgers's portent of murder, and even more striking is how

Dorian's forays into this hedonism result in his becoming a marked criminal. The first indication of his descent into crime, naturally, serves as his infliction of mortality upon the painting itself. Upon realizing that his cruelty had warped the painting, "a sense of infinite pity, not for himself, but for the painted image of himself, [comes] over him" (101). This sense of pity relays an initial sense of moral conscience, for he pities how the reflection of his soul would decay through his actions. Quickly, his emotion metamorphoses from guilt to a morbid fascination. Dorian shifts from mourning "the pity of it" to believing that "there would be a real pleasure in watching it" age in his place (116). Beyond simply inflicting mortality onto a masterpiece, Dorian takes his indulgences further by believing that he would gain pleasure from watching the painting decay in his place. He relishes in the actual inscription of his crimes upon his body through the painting, and, in doing so, he gives himself incentive to allow his monstrous nature to run wild.

The destruction of art becomes an aesthetic experience itself, then. It provides a means of pleasure through the observation of its destruction, and the experience of pleasure has significance through the fact that the Dorian's body remains the *imago* rather than the portrait. This substitutes the saying "*L'art pour l'art*" that so often serves as a tenet for Aestheticism. It implies an appreciation for art that transcends both moral and utilitarian purpose; in the case of Wilde's novel, Dorian exhibits an appreciation for art because it reflects the decay of his soul while preserving the beauty of his body. As Wilde phrases it in the introduction, "no artist has ethical sympathies" (6). When the abuse of art becomes an art, then that, too, falls within the notion of art for art's sake, for it is still art

without “ethical sympathies.” It also highlights how such wanton indulgences ultimately result in corruption and eventual damnation of the self. Indeed, in defense of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde states that “the real moral of the story is that all excess, as well as renunciation, brings its punishment” (Beckson 72). Dorian indulges in excess through his epicurean pursuits, and his renunciation is not a rejection of aesthetic indulgences but a rejection of his society. His soul’s corruption brings him a great deal of pleasure, and his observation of it becomes another indulgence on a long list of epicurean pursuits. This is highlighted by Dorian’s thought that “Art, like Nature, has her monsters” (*PoDG&OS* 147). As an embodiment of art, he recognizes his existence as a monster of his own creation, and it invokes in him a sense of “curious delight” (147). Because he enjoys observing the decay of his portrait, Dorian revels in the experience of his own monstrous deeds as an art form.

Beyond the artists and monsters, the women of either text play a pivotal role in displaying the decay of indulgence into corruption, and they also provide additional insight into the varying fates of Wilde’s monsters. Moreover, their bodies act as vessels for art itself. Dorian first describes Sibyl to Lord Henry as having “not merely art, but consummate art-instinct, in her” (*PoDG&OS* 65). Art, in Sibyl, exists as an interior medium that only manifests itself when she performs. Dorian insists that she has “personality also,” yet he previously asserted that she “never” is Sibyl Vane (62-63). These prove to be a series of contradictory praises. If Sibyl has personality but is never herself, then her personality stems only from the manifestation of her art. Furthermore, she cannot embody true art if art itself exists consummately within her; instead, her body

serves as a vessel for art rather than a tangible substitution of art for life. Sibyl's existence is "collapsed into a set of figural functions" by this series of contractions (*BTM* 53). In Dorian's eyes, Sibyl must play the role of actress and art form, but she may never be herself. Dorian exclaims that he wants a "breath of [their] passion to stir [dead lovers'] dust into consciousness, to wake their ashes into pain," invoking the famous lovers of past plays or art with his statement (62). Dorian aspires to obtain an art that surpasses earlier masterpieces with Sibyl. He uses her to experience that which he has already experienced vicariously through art. Ablow postulates on this notion of vicarious experiences:

Art . . . also makes us experience that self as if it belonged to somebody else. And, of course, this seems to be precisely the point, for this vicariousness, self-alienation, or internal distantiation serves to transform feelings that seem both self-evidently true and our own into things we can take as objects of pleasure and interest. (180)

The notion of experience of "self as it belonged to somebody else" certainly applies to Sibyl, who fails to ever be Sibyl Vane, and Dorian's appraisal of this aspect as art effectively implicates how her art may enable them to experience a passionate love that does not belong to them. The romance that Dorian suggests would be consumed as an "object of pleasure," as Ablow suggests, rather than a traditional romance.

Sibyl's death provides another glimpse into how a wanton indulgence of pleasure and beauty ultimately proves destructive for both the thing of beauty and the viewer himself. As a man of superficiality, Dorian consumes the "art" within Sibyl and robs her of her

role as vessel. When she performs after their engagement, her lines “were spoken in a thoroughly artificial manner” (*PoDG&OS* 92). Her ability to become other characters originally enraptured Dorian Gray, yet upon being proposed to, Sibyl Vane abruptly becomes incapable of serving as art’s vessel and becoming anyone other than herself. She exclaims that Dorian has revealed that “all art is but a reflection” of true love (96). Her perception of art, of course, conflicts with Dorian’s. Elfenbein reflects on this phenomenon, blaming in particular Sibyl’s relation with Tennyson’s the Lady of Shalott: “the Lady . . . turns . . . to see Lancelot and subsequently dies. Sibyl . . . has discovered true love and acts badly; . . . her poor acting leads to Dorian’s scorn and her eventual suicide” (490). She experienced the vicarious pleasures of art prior to meeting Dorian, and then he moved her to adore realism over the superficiality of art. Dorian, conversely, loved the art in her rather than her real life. He based his amorous feelings for her solely upon his interest in her as another piece of art to give him pleasure. According to his inward musings, Dorian gives Sibyl his love because “he had dreamed of her as a great artist . . . [but] she had been shallow and unworthy” (*PoDG&OS* 100). The accusation provides insight into the decay of Dorian’s standards. “Shallow,” in his definition, deals with reality and legitimacy; substance, then, proves to be the beauty of art and indulgence. In short, he feels that Sibyl’s embracement of “real” love makes her too shallow to be filled by art’s inspiration; her passion for him occupies that interior space and makes her a poor vessel. He perceived Sibyl’s “actual life [as] but a shadow . . . [of] her existence upon the stage” (Chai 22). When her life becomes more than a figment of her existence in theater, the resulting lack of art renders Sibyl as lifeless to Dorian and, by

extension, herself. Dorian acknowledges this by remarking that he “murdered her as surely as if [he] had cut her little throat with a knife” (*PoDG&OS* 109). By destroying her art with his own aspirations, Dorian also murders her. This first “crime” exemplifies how the nature of his monstrosity ultimately destroys both life and art through his consumption.

Most importantly, Dorian’s pleasure in Sibyl’s artistic aesthetics primarily occurs at the cost of societal duty. Dorian, during one of many opportunities to do such, finds himself faced with an opportunity to “resist temptation” and “not . . . listen to those subtle poisonous theories that . . . had first stirred within him the passion for impossible things” (101). His opportunity to resist temptation (or succumb to it) proves to be a matter of influence. He must choose between Lord Henry’s influence and what he refers to as his “duty” in Sibyl (101). Unlike Dorian’s other opportunities to repent, he resolves to follow his duty, and he reassures himself that “they would be happy together. His life with her would be beautiful and pure” (102). This transformation seems abrupt and insincere following Dorian’s sharp rebuttal of Sibyl’s value based on her representation of art, but he attempts to avoid his descent into monstrous behavior despite the insincerity of his escape and despite the inscription of past crimes on his canvas. His insincerity is underscored by his response to Sibyl’s suicide; he does not mourn for the life lost but for the fact that “there is nothing to keep [him] straight” without her (109). This illustrates the true motivation for Dorian’s insincerity. Like Lord Arthur, Dorian strives to abort his inevitable corruption by ceasing his pursuit of a new epicureanism. Unlike Lord Arthur, Dorian’s crime has already run its course before he could think to escape it; he tries to

consume the art within Sibyl, and in that attempted consumption, he murders not only Sibyl but also his hopes of redemption.

In a similar fashion, Lord Arthur's Sybil proves to be his inspiration behind his rejection of his criminal nature and his adoption of a sense of duty. During Lord Arthur's first attempted murder, he suffers from the temptation to prevent himself from murdering Lady Clem and marrying Sybil as though his palm held no portent of murder but only "the beauty that stir[s] his sense [and touches] his conscience also" (265). Lord Arthur admires his Sybil for the same beauty for which Dorian admires his Sibyl, but unlike Dorian, Lord Arthur accepts Sybil as more than a vessel for artistic beauty. When faced with the threat of Mr. Podgers learning that Lord Arthur has a "bad temper, or a tendency to gout," Lord Arthur coolly responds with the assertion that "Sybil knows me as well as I know her" (250). This knowledge occurs on a personal level; Lord Arthur and his fiancé exhibit a mutual knowledge of character beyond the aesthetic adoptions of "character" present in theater. Dorian lacks this knowledge, for he only knows and loves his Sibyl for her art, as his swift betrayal demonstrates. Lord Arthur, on the other hand, appreciates both the art of his fiancé and her personality, as well; he, unlike Dorian, glimpses beneath the surface of artifice and is not found wanting. He indulges in his aesthetic attempts at murder not for the purpose of pleasure but out of respect for both Sybil's art and life.

The murders at the heart of either novel prove indicative of how the corruption differs with each monster. Lord Arthur's forays result in a series of failed murders, and his one successful murder—the assumed "crime" of the story's title—proves to be a fulfillment of societal obligation rather than a matter of self-indulgence. In an ironic twist

of fate, the “murder” that Mr. Podgers foresaw in Lord Arthur’s palm proves to be his own. The violence with which Lord Arthur kills Mr. Podgers is remarkably impromptu; he abruptly seizes “Mr. Podgers by the legs, and [flings] him into the Thames” (277). There exists no artifice in this death. The only image of Mr. Podger’s demise proves to be “a tall hat, pirouetting in an eddy of moonlit water,” and the beautiful language coupled with the abruptness of the death emphasizes beauty through happenstance rather than artifice (277). The success of Lord Arthur’s murder and the punishment of Mr. Podgers pivot on a matter of art: of the two, only Lord Arthur respects the art of chiromancy by accepting Mr. Podgers’s reading as Fate. As Lady Windermere reveals at the story’s conclusion, Mr. Podgers proves to be “a dreadful impostor” (280). This statement reveals Mr. Podgers’s poor control over an art both occult and commoditized, for she suggests that his prior readings bore no significance. Furthermore, Navarre attributes Mr. Podgers’ infidelity to his art as more than simple fraud. Navarre states how both Wilde and Heron-Allen, a real-life chiromantist and close friend of Wilde, “emphasize the axiom of ‘Know Thyself’” within the art of chiromancy (181). With this in mind, the “crime” of the title becomes mutual. Lord Arthur does not completely embrace his identity as a criminal, and he instead treats the murder as a tedious, societal obligation. Lord Arthur denies his identity as a monstrous criminal by eradicating the only one capable of deciphering the inscriptions on his body.

Mr. Podgers’s crime, too, proves to be based on the knowledge and acceptance of a corporeal identity in art (or lack thereof). Though the morals of his fraudulence might be questioned because “the duty to tell the truth” was rewarded within chiromancy, this

assumption does not prove compatible with Wilde's treatises on art (181). In both the preface to *Dorian Gray* and in his essay "The Critic as Artist," Wilde suggests that "all art is, in its essence, immoral" (*Essays* 162). Moreover, he suggests that "the sphere of art and the sphere of ethics are absolutely distinct and separate" (Beckson 67). Though these two statements seem contradictory, both are true; all art is considered immoral in a society where "security lies in . . . custom," for if art exists outside of the sphere of ethics, then it exists outside of the sphere of societal norms (*Essays* 162). Therefore, Mr. Podgers's "crime" is not one of dishonesty or amoral behavior, but the same "crime" faced by Wilde's other monsters: Mr. Podgers suffers corruption by his epicurean pursuit of art. Like the other characters of the story, proof of his excess lurks in his corporeal form. Lord Arthur studies Mr. Podgers's "fat, flabby face, the gold-rimmed spectacles, the sickly feeble smile, [and] the sensual mouth" prior to killing him (*PoDG&OS* 277). His rotund form speaks of the degree of his consumption, and the peculiar depiction of his mouth as "sensual" gestures to its use of wanton deception to obtain personal ends through art. Furthermore, Mr. Podgers proved poorly suited for the job itself, for Lady Windermere remarks that Mr. Podgers was "not a bit like a chiromantist . . . [meaning] he is not mysterious, or esoteric, or romantic-looking" (247). His lack of proper chiromantist traits alludes to his lack of the true art form, and it propagates the semblance of phrenological criminology established at the beginning of the story. In short, Mr. Podgers lacks the physical attributes of a chiromantist, and his shortcomings as a legitimate chiromancer only occur through the external interpretation of his body by Lady Windermere. This reflects Mr. Podgers' own reading of Lord Arthur at the beginning of

the story, and further cements his position as another doomed by Aesthetic indulgence. Therefore, when the newspapers announce Mr. Podgers' death as "Suicide of Chiromantist," the words carry an unexpected truth (278). His corruption occurs when he indulges in art to the point of practicing it dishonestly, and Lord Arthur deals out his punishment. The "suicide" emphasizes how Lord Arthur's actions are the direct result of Mr. Podger's own indulgences and influence.

Wilde expands on his exploration of how aesthetic indulgences lead to a "suicide" of sorts in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and this exploration, like the one in "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime," occurs through the murder. Though the artist is the victim, Basil Hallward plays a central role in the development of his monster in a similar fashion to Mr. Podgers. Upon first seeing Dorian, Basil becomes overwhelmed by "a curious sensation of terror" (14). His terror is not so much the fear of impending danger so much as it is an apprehension towards impending creation. He acknowledges upon first glance that Dorian would "absorb . . . [his] whole nature, [his] very art itself" (14). The consumption of art, in this case, hardly denotes anything beneficial, for Basil likens it to feeling as though he "was on the verge of a terrible crisis in his life" (14). Already, Basil is linked intimately to his painting and, by extension, to Dorian. If the secret of Basil's soul lies within the painting, and the painting becomes linked to Dorian's body, then the souls of the two men become inexorably linked. This link illustrates how Basil is responsible for Dorian's monstrous nature by indulging too much in Dorian's portrait. Wilde warns against this in the preface; he remarks that "to reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim" (5). By revealing too much of himself in the painting, Basil causes the

decay of the painting to serve as his own destruction. During the last moments of his life, Basil bemoans that “[he] worshiped [Dorian] too much . . . [Dorian] worshiped [himself] too much. [They] are both punished” (170). Their crime, according to Basil, deals with too much of an indulgence in the self. As much as Dorian wished to indulge in his *imago*, so too did Basil find Dorian’s visage equally pleasing, and he put too much of himself into its interpretation and inscription. Though Basil has not done any of the deeds that corrupted the painting, his personal indulgence still bears responsibility for the crime. The corruption still inflicts him, and he becomes the victim of his own monstrous nature.

This self-propagating destruction reflects Wilde’s own apprehensions about the artistic life, for he writes in one of his letters that “the artistic life is a long and lovely suicide” (*Letters* 64). By “artistic life,” he no doubt means the ideal referenced earlier and embraced by his characters: the experience of art is preferable to the experience of life. With this sentiment in mind, it comes as no surprise that the final murder in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* proves to be the conclusion of Dorian’s own “long and lovely” suicide. After all, Dorian’s life has been a literal substitution of life by art, and he reflects on this phenomenon with the remark that “it was his beauty that had ruined him” (*PoDG&OS* 237). This occurs during the final moment in the text in which Dorian confronts and is confronted by his own *imago*. With this confrontation, he peers into a mirror and, as a result of his own loathing, flings it “on the floor, crush[ing] it into silver splinters beneath his heel” (237). Like his first mirror-stage, Dorian’s reflection still is that of Basil’s painting. This time, however, his actual body bears the visage of the original painting; though he strives to see himself as himself, he, instead, is confronted by what remains

someone else's interpretation of him. The influence of the older men remains. Dorian's pursuit of a new epicureanism only teaches him that "his beauty had been to him but a mask, his youth but a mockery" (237). As such, his infinite youth becomes a source of monstrous malformation in its own right. This represents an eventual decay that the pursuit of indulgences creates, for in the course of Dorian's indulgences, his own desire for beauty becomes unsatisfactory as well. Indeed, Dorian goes on to acknowledge that Basil's murder was committed out of a "desire for a new sensation" (239). His need for new sensations prompts Dorian to attempt to destroy the evidence of past experiences. This is done not only in hopes that the destruction will remove evidence of past sins, but also as a final, desperate act of epicureanism. Dorian acts out against his portrait in hopes that, by erasing the flaws of his *imago*, he would create a veritable "blank canvas" for new experiences, or an unmarked body not yet malformed by monstrous transgressions. This act, of course, only allows his "long and lovely" suicide to reach its fruition. After stabbing the portrait, Dorian is discovered on the ground with "a knife in his heart," and he appears "withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage" (241). With this suicide, life returns to art; every amoral act that Dorian has committed inscribes itself upon his corporeal body, causing his true visage to, at last, become a presentation of his own construction. Conversely, the portrait itself returns to its original splendor.

This "suicide," along with its motivations, reveals the precise means through which an indulgence in aesthetic pursuits results in an inevitable corruption and destruction. Dorian's desperate state of boredom reflects desire's sordid counterpart: ennui. Like the crimes themselves, ennui depicts itself through the presentation of "a

weary body” in both texts (Nunokawa 73). As Nunokawa points out, Lord Henry initially acts as the physical presence of ennui, but it appears frequently in all three of the central men. When Lord Henry sits, he flings himself upon the furniture, collapsing like a body that has exerted itself (*PoDG&OS* 32). Dorian reclines languidly on furniture (52). Wilde frequently employs the adjective “listless” as a description for all three men (10,11,52)

Ennui acts as an expression of the body rather than an inscription; it is one experience that remains consistent throughout each new sensation. Even Chai acknowledges the inescapable presence of ennui in the tenets of Aestheticism; Chai notes that “a desire no longer satisfied by its former sources must now seek gratification elsewhere . . . thus one arrives at an aesthetic of bittersweet pleasures, of joys that mingle happiness with pain” (96). The pleasure becomes bittersweet because it cannot last. The brevity of pleasure, then, underscores the inevitability of ennui. Indeed, Dorian confesses to Basil that he “cannot repeat an emotion” (*PoDG&OS* 120). Boredom with experiences eventually leads to brevity of experience, and this boredom creates a renewed desire for stimulation in stimulation’s absence. The use of bodies as an expressive medium for ennui illustrates how bodies have the ability, “while striving for . . . organic and psychic wholeness, . . . to produce fragmentations” (Grosz 12). Ennui creates a desire to obtain wholeness through pleasurable experience, but the search for such a completion of experiences is destructive. Such ennui, in the case of Wilde’s monsters, leads to desperate and destructive acts. Wilde himself later becomes a victim of his own ennui; in *De Profundis*, he remarks how he, “tired of being on the heights, . . . deliberately went to the depths in the search for new sensation” (38). The consequence of ennui, then, as indicated by the suicides of the

novels and Wilde's own plunge to the "depths," is a fall of biblical proportions. Those in search of new experiences inevitably experience listlessness, and they fall morally to engage in darker pleasures.

The ennui, furthermore, is not limited to Dorian's society. It also appears rampant in the society of "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime." Lady Windermere, in particular, serves as the tired body of the text. She provides the societal compass for ennui, for she frequently remarks on her passing fancies and resulting boredom. To Sybil, she comments that "as soon as [she] gets to know people, [she] gets tired of them," and she also notes that her "lions are only good for one season" (*PoDG&OS* 280). Her "lions," of course, refer to the individuals that she appropriates for the entertainment of herself and her guests, and she refers to her lions as "performing lions" that "jump through hoops whenever [she] ask[s] them" (250). The brevity of Lady Windermere's experiences with other people represents a societal type of ennui, and her depiction of her acquaintances as "lions"—a rather intimidating term for innocuous entertainment—suggests that even dangerous entertainments would be as seasonal to her as her lions. The brevity of her interests, therefore, represents the extent to which ennui rules her life. Lady Windermere eventually finds her bored double in Lord Arthur himself, for he is described as "listlessly" turning pages in the newspaper following his murder of Mr. Podgers (278). This is the only time in the text where Lord Arthur exhibits a semblance of the ennui rife within his society, and his boredom's proximity to his discovery of the headline implies that his is the ennui which follows new sensation. Like Lady Windermere and her "lions," Lord Arthur has

already tired of the new experience of murder by this point, and the resulting boredom creates an opportunity for the pursuit of new experiences.

Rather than indulge in the desire created by its absence in ennui, Lord Arthur eschews any indulgence in addition to monstrous behavior. Instead, he proscribes his own interpretation to chiromancy without indulging in it further. When Lady Windermere inquires into his beliefs about chiromancy, Lord Arthur presents his response in a murmur: “Because I owe to it all the happiness of my life” (280). Though he quickly associates “Sybil” as the source of this happiness, his actions suggest a far different motivation. His murder of Mr. Podgers, as previously asserted, occurs as Lord Arthur’s means of preventing his body from being interpreted as a monstrous criminal. Therein, his happiness stems from society’s inability to decipher his existence as a murderer. This lack of decipherment enables him to present himself as a “normal” body and to enjoy the resulting privileges. His ennui resurfaces prior to his deceptive answer, appearing in the way that he “throw[s] himself into a wicker chair” (280). The gesture reflects the tired bodies of *Dorian Gray*, for it depicts the same bored method that Lord Henry displayed while sitting. Lord Arthur’s apparent ennui, therefore, further illustrates how his happiness has relatively little to do with Sybil and more to do with his rejection of his bodily identity and his desire for additional experiences. This rejection leads to what Cohen refers to as Lord Arthur’s own suicide; unlike *Dorian Gray*, Lord Arthur commits suicide by “murdering his evil instinct before it springs fully to life” (107). This is not the “long and lovely” suicide that is associated with the artistic life. Rather, this is a spiritual suicide, one that destroys Lord Arthur’s nature along with the potential for new

experiences. It severs his personal experiences from those written on his body through his deference to society. Lady Windermere's exclamation, then, reflects what Wilde intends to be the audience's own reaction to Lord Arthur's claims: "what nonsense!" (*PoDG&OS* 280).

The juxtaposition of these characters, their crimes, and their bodies presents an ultimatum for those involved in Aestheticism. Beyond the premise of an inevitable suicide, Wilde's portrayal of Lord Arthur and Dorian Gray speaks of the relationship between bodily experiences and the self. Initially, Wilde presents Lord Arthur Savile, who falls prey to influence but shuns the identity that he finds there. His murder of Mr. Podgers is a deed of mutual responsibility; the guilt belongs to Mr. Podgers as much as it belongs to Lord Arthur. The singular crime implied by the title, then, refers to Lord Arthur's crime against himself: killing one's sensations is a kind of suicide. By scorning the *imago* inscribed on his palm, he suffers a break between his body and mind. He portrays the bodily ennui that indicates a desire for new experiences, but his mind denies this ennui and abolishes his desires. This ambivalence proves to be the cause of Wilde's "ironic praise of Lord Arthur" at the story's conclusion (Cohen 105). Though Lord Arthur avoids the temptations of corruption and amoral behavior, he does so at the expense of his own identity and experiences. He complies too much to societal expectations, and in his pursuit of social normativity, he becomes quite abnormal and unnatural. His mind operates exclusively from his body, preventing him from identifying his experiences or understanding the art still inscribed on his palm. Through this fracturing, Lord Arthur does not become a monster through societal crime but through natural crime. This causes

him to serve as an embodiment of the second type of monster: that which defers to society and defies his nature.

Alternatively, Wilde presents the monstrous nature of Dorian Gray who, in the process of embracing his own *imago*, ultimately destroys both his body and his soul. Dorian does not turn from the reflection imposed on him by art; rather, he embraces it. He seeks out new sensations until his ennui causes him to succumb to corruption. Even in the moments when he seeks to put an end to his desires, his attempts are insincere. Dorian only considers returning to Sibyl because she provides him with a moral compass, and upon losing her, he eventually murders Basil and destroys the remaining moral voice in his existence. Despite this amoral and monstrous behavior, Dorian retains a sense of unity between mind and body. He expresses hatred for being “separated from the picture that was such a part of his life,” for the portrait embodies his soul just as his physical body embodies the portrait (*PoDG&OS* 152). This relationship enables Dorian to possess a “pride of individualism,” but the cost of this individualism proves to be devastating (152). Dorian ultimately experiences so much that even the pleasurable, aesthetic experience of beauty becomes unsatisfactory, and in an effort to experience more, he destroys himself. Dorian Gray is kindred to the criminal monster that the Victorian society feared. He embraces his malformed nature and pursues his desires, but he does so at the expense of his societal obligations.

In conclusion, Wilde uses *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and “Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime” to present a reflection of the texts’ spectators. Through the mutual murders and suicides of his protagonists, he reveals the rather sordid costs of indulging in the Aesthete

lifestyle. Moreover, the texts create a narrative that depicts how experiences inscribe themselves on the body. As a result of this inscription, the protagonists have the choice of indulging in their experiences and pursuing more or severing their relationship with their inscribed identities and rejecting future experiences. Because the experience of art is preferable to the experience of life, Wilde utilizes Aesthetic indulgences as the means through which his monsters explore the implications of their experiences and identities. Moreover, he uses it to show how art, effectively, may exist as an immoral entity; it conjures desire, whose absence creates boredom, which, in turn, ultimately results in desperate acts for new sensations. This possibility creates what Wilde refers to as a “long and lovely suicide” for those invested in the artistic life; through the pursuit of new temptations, the brevity of pleasure causes the conquest to become corrupted and, eventually, destructive of the self. Though Wilde poses an alternative to this inevitable decay, his presentation suggests that retaining moral behavior in the face of indulgence is as monstrous as its alternative. Though inaction acts as a solution to the inevitable descent of indulgence into criminal behavior, it is also an insincere and unnatural solution. It requires a rejection of both bodily experiences and self, and this rejection marks a more brutal form of suicide, far removed from the pleasures of an aesthetic lifestyle. As such, Wilde’s protagonists cannot completely escape their monstrous nature; either they become monsters through their indulgences in Aestheticism, or they become monstrous because their abstinence alters them.

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