



The picture of

Dorian Gray

by

Oscar Wilde

# Historical contest:

- Politically, it is in the Victorian Age that the British Empire reaches its greatest extension.
- The myth of progress is central to Victorian Age. Science and philosophy of Positivism are its theoretical bases: both concepts argue that reality may be rationally understood, analysed and controlled by man.
- The triumph of industry and technology is the practical side of the new religion of progress. Especially in the second part of the Victorian Age, however, there is a widespread reaction to the consequences of the Industrial Revolution
- The Victorian period may be divided into two phases: the early Victorian and late Victorian: The first phase corresponds to a general acceptance of the age's ethical and social standards, the second one corresponds to a general anti-Victorian reaction, visible in 2 literary schools: Realism and Decadentism.
- A fundamental part in the anti-Victorian reaction is played by emancipation of women.

# London

## **What the industrial revolution caused:**

- The population increased from 1 million to 6 million in a century
- overcrowded slums
- poor sanitation and heavy air
- golden age of steam
- 1st railway from London Bridge to Greenwich (1836)
- the Great Exhibition of 1851 → Crystal Palace



## Crime

- petty crime
- violent crime were not so usual

## Public Buildings

- the tube (1863)
- Tower Bridge (1894)
- public squares were offered for pleasure
- Big Ben

## Shopping

- department stores in which people used to spend an entire day



# Oscar Wilde life and works

- Oscar Wilde was born in 1854 in Dublin.
- He studied at Trinity college, in Dublin, and at Magdalen college, in Oxford.
- He embraced Decadentism or Aesthetic Movement.
- In 1883 he married Constance Lloyd.
- Between 1885 and 1891 he wrote a series of fables, collected in 2 volumes:
  - > The happy prince and Other tales(1888)
  - > A House of Pomegranates(1891)





86. Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas  
1894  
*Published in Lord Alfred Douglas's Autobiography, 1929*

- His first literary success came in 1892 with a novel „The Picture of Dorian Gray“, and after that, he produced several light comedies like:

- > Lady Windermere's Fan (1895)
- > A Woman of No Importance (1893)
- > An Ideal Husband (1895)
- > The Importance of Being Earnest (1895)

- In 1895 he was arrested for his homosexual relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas; his period in prison gave him the inspiration for:

- > The Ballad of Reading Gaol (1898)
- > De Profundis (1905)

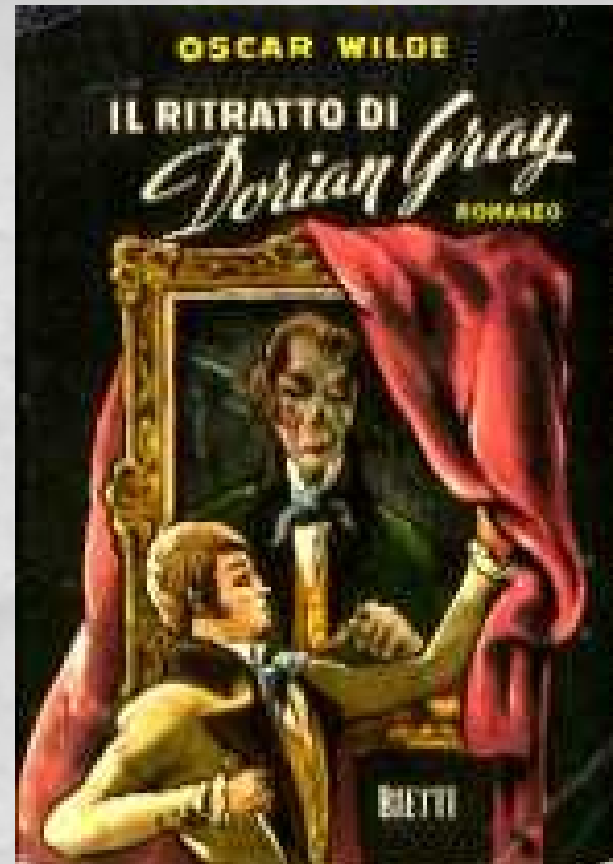
- He left prison in 1897 and he went to Paris.

- He died in 1900

# The picture of Dorian Gray

## Features of time and style:

- chronological order of the events
- the narration cover 20 years of Dorian's life
- third-person narrator
- non-omniscient narrator
- full of dialogues and monologues
- high language



Dorian Gray:  
Handsome, young,  
blonde curly hair and  
light blue eyes.



**Basil:** The painters of  
the picture of Dorian.

He secretly loves Dorian,  
he will always care about  
Dorian and this will  
cause his death.

He truly believes in the  
innate goodness of  
mankind.





## Lord Henry:

Tall, delightful, white  
big hands.

He has a big influences  
on Dorian's changing of  
personality.



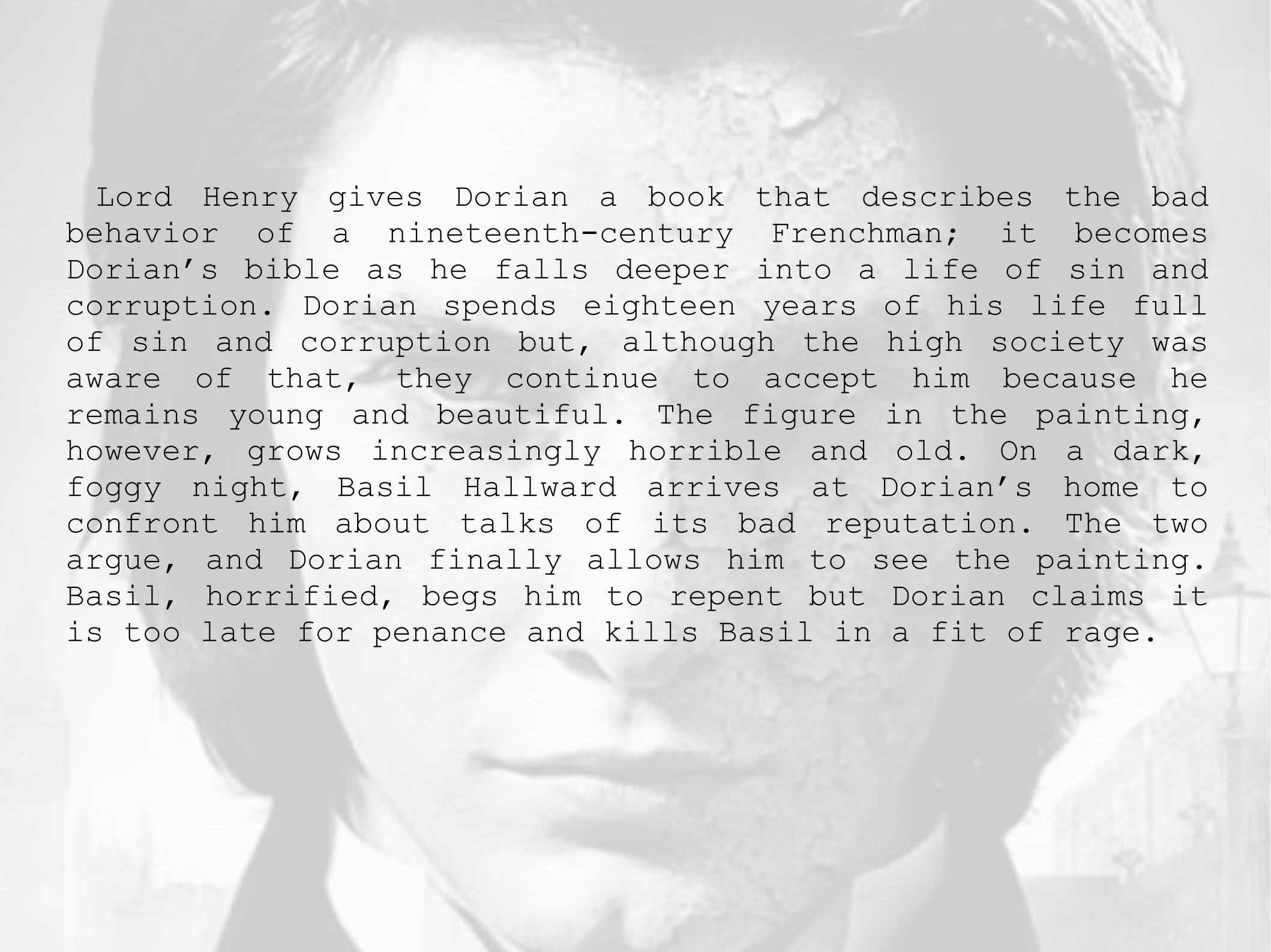
## **Sybil Vane:**

beautiful, talented, and totally innocent her lack of cynicism makes her particularly vulnerable to just about everything; Her suicide is the great tragedy of this novel and it's the turning point for Dorian.

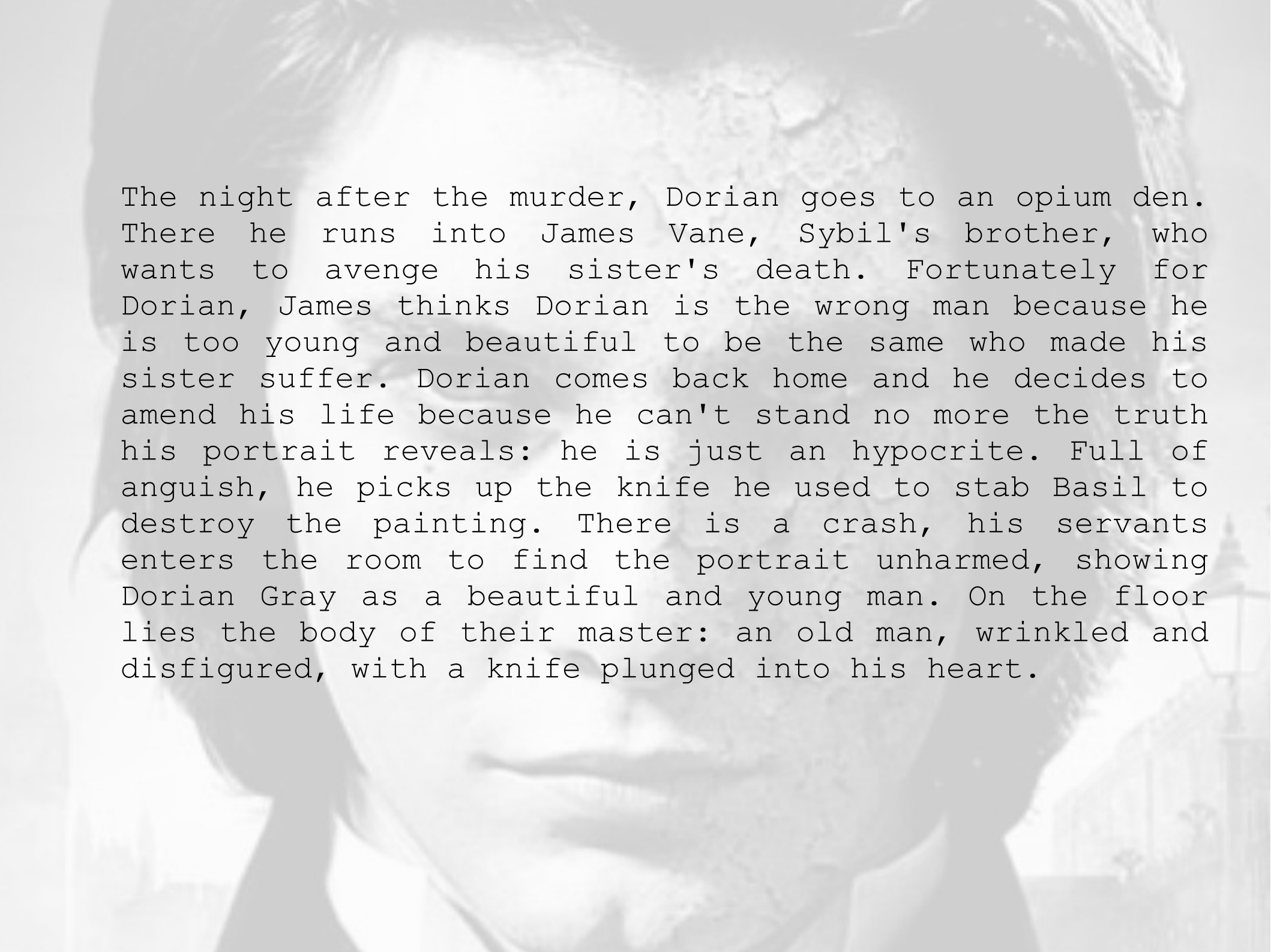
# The plot:

In London the well-known artist Basil Hallward meets Dorian Gray, a cultured, wealthy, and beautiful young man who immediately captures Basil's artistic imagination. When the novel opens, the artist is completing a portrait of Dorian as he truly is, but, as he admits to his friend Lord Henry, the painting disappoints him because it reveals too much of his feeling for his subject. Lord Henry disagrees, claiming that the portrait is Basil's masterpiece. Dorian arrives at the studio, and Basil reluctantly introduces him to Lord Henry, who he fears will have a damaging influence on the impressionable, young Dorian. Before the end of their first conversation, Lord Henry upsets Dorian with a speech about the transient nature of beauty and youth. Worried that these, his most impressive characteristics, are fading day by day, Dorian curses his portrait, which he believes will one day remind him of the beauty he will have lost. In a fit of distress, he pledges his soul if only the painting could bear the burden of age and infamy, allowing him to stay forever young. Over the next few weeks, Lord Henry's influence over Dorian grows stronger.

The youth becomes a disciple of the "new Hedonism" and proposes to live a life dedicated to the pursuit of pleasure. He falls in love with Sibyl Vane, a young actress who performs in a theater in London's slums. He adores her acting; she, in turn, refers to him as "Prince Charming" and refuses to heed the warnings of her brother, James Vane, that Dorian is no good for her. Dorian, who loves Sibyl *because* of her ability to act, cruelly breaks his engagement with her when she loses her acting skills. After doing so, he returns home to notice that his face in Basil's portrait of him has changed: it now sneers. Frightened for his soul and that his sins will be recorded on the canvas, he resolves to make amends with Sibyl the next day. The following afternoon, however, Lord Henry brings news that Sibyl has killed herself. Henry convinces Dorian not feel guilty for that and he then hides his portrait in a remote upper room of his house, where no one other than he can watch its transformation.



Lord Henry gives Dorian a book that describes the bad behavior of a nineteenth-century Frenchman; it becomes Dorian's bible as he falls deeper into a life of sin and corruption. Dorian spends eighteen years of his life full of sin and corruption but, although the high society was aware of that, they continue to accept him because he remains young and beautiful. The figure in the painting, however, grows increasingly horrible and old. On a dark, foggy night, Basil Hallward arrives at Dorian's home to confront him about talks of its bad reputation. The two argue, and Dorian finally allows him to see the painting. Basil, horrified, begs him to repent but Dorian claims it is too late for penance and kills Basil in a fit of rage.



The night after the murder, Dorian goes to an opium den. There he runs into James Vane, Sybil's brother, who wants to avenge his sister's death. Fortunately for Dorian, James thinks Dorian is the wrong man because he is too young and beautiful to be the same who made his sister suffer. Dorian comes back home and he decides to amend his life because he can't stand no more the truth his portrait reveals: he is just an hypocrite. Full of anguish, he picks up the knife he used to stab Basil to destroy the painting. There is a crash, his servants enters the room to find the portrait unharmed, showing Dorian Gray as a beautiful and young man. On the floor lies the body of their master: an old man, wrinkled and disfigured, with a knife plunged into his heart.

# Themes :

- The purpose of art:

The purpose of art is to have no purpose. The Victorians believed that art could be used as a tool for social education and moral enlightenment, but the aestheticism movement, of which Wilde was a major proponent, sought to free art from this responsibility.

- The supremacy of youth and beauty:

The only principle of aestheticism is that art serves no other purpose than to offer beauty. It is a means of escaping the brutalities of the world: Dorian distances himself, not to mention his consciousness, from the horrors of his actions by devoting himself to the study of beautiful things. The novel also suggests that the price one must pay for them ( youth and beauty) is exceedingly high. Indeed, Dorian gives nothing less than his soul.

- The superficial nature of society:

As Dorian evolves into the realization of a type, the perfect blend of scholar and socialite, he experiences the freedom to abandon his morals without censure. Indeed, even though, as Basil warns, society's elite question his name and reputation, Dorian is never ostracized. On the contrary, despite his "mode of life," he remains at the heart of the London social scene because of the "innocence" and "purity of his face." As Lady Narborough notes to Dorian, there is little (if any) distinction between ethics and appearance: "you are made to be good—you look so good."

- The negative nonsequences of influence:

- The painting and the yellow book have a profound effect on Dorian, influencing him to predominantly immoral behavior over the course of nearly two decades.

-Basil's idolatry of Dorian leads to his murder, and Dorian's devotion to Lord Henry's hedonism and the yellow book precipitate his own downfall.

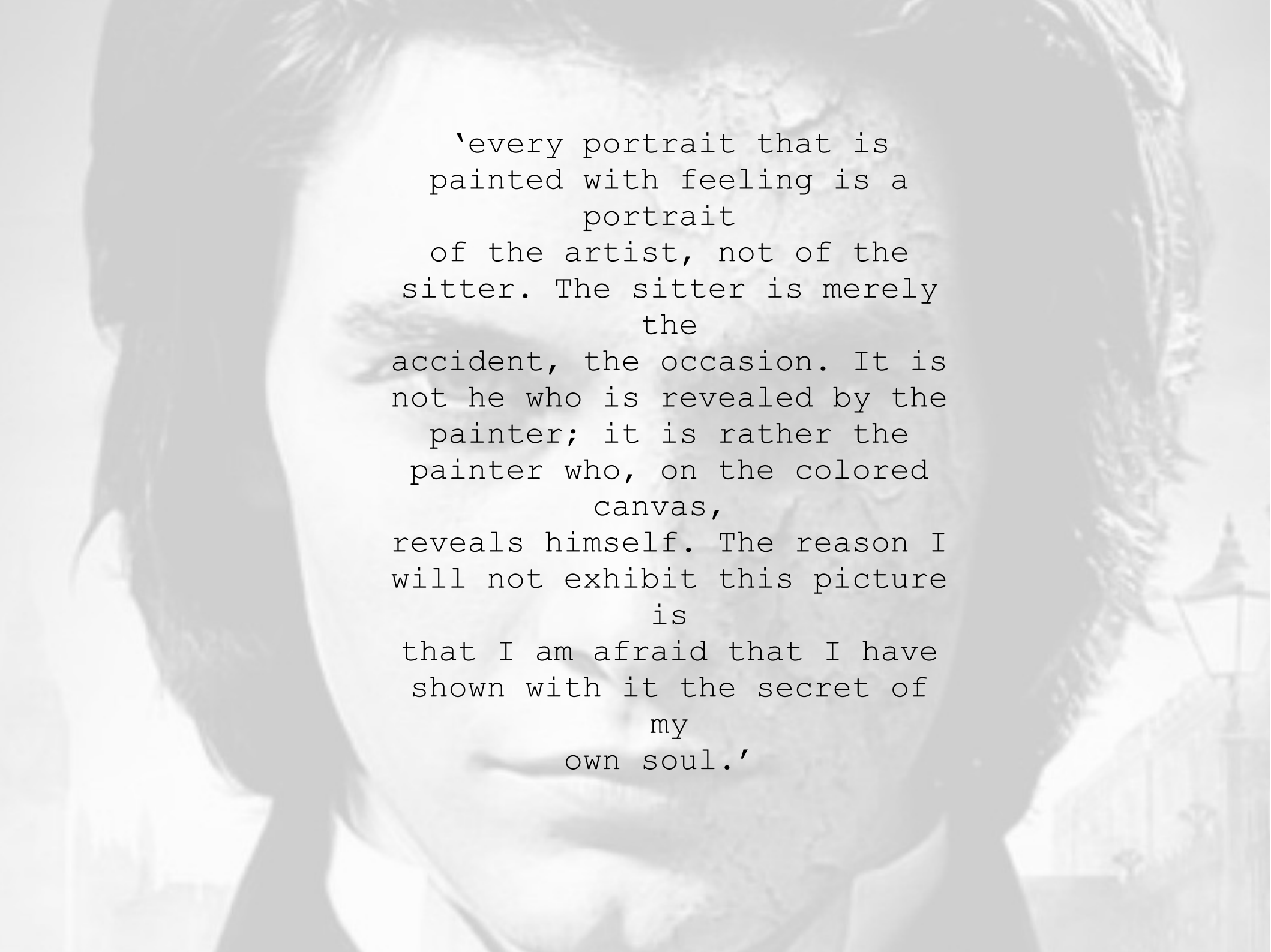
# The change of personality in Dorian Gray:

Dorian Gray pretty much was the typical dandy from the start of the novel.

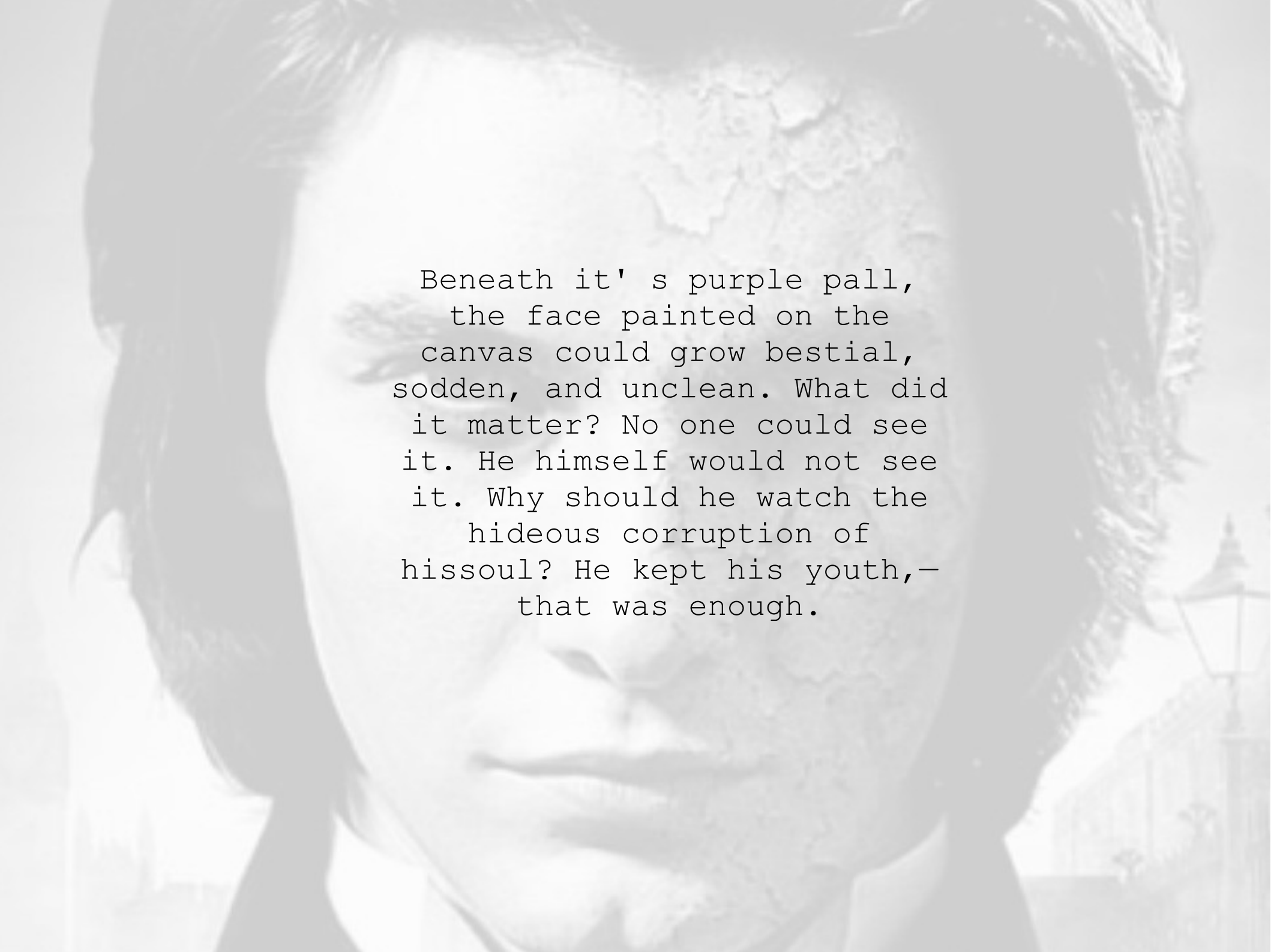
There are two major changes:

- First, his supposed "falling in love" with the poor actress Sybil Vane.
- Secondly, came his debauchery period.





'every portrait that is  
painted with feeling is a  
portrait  
of the artist, not of the  
sitter. The sitter is merely  
the  
accident, the occasion. It is  
not he who is revealed by the  
painter; it is rather the  
painter who, on the colored  
canvas,  
reveals himself. The reason I  
will not exhibit this picture  
is  
that I am afraid that I have  
shown with it the secret of  
my  
own soul.'



Beneath it' s purple pall,  
the face painted on the  
canvas could grow bestial,  
sodden, and unclean. What did  
it matter? No one could see  
it. He himself would not see  
it. Why should he watch the  
hideous corruption of  
hissoul? He kept his youth,—  
that was enough.

'Dorian, Dorian,' she  
cried, 'before I knew you,  
acting  
was the one reality of my  
life.

[...]

You came,—oh, my beautiful  
love!—

and you freed my soul from  
prison. You taught me what  
reality really is.

[...]

Oh, Dorian,

Dorian, you understand now  
what it all means? Even if

I

could do it, it would be  
profanation for me to play  
at

being in love. You have  
made me see that.'

He flung himself down on  
the sofa, and turned away  
his face. 'You have killed  
my love,' he muttered.



<<I've nothing to declare but my genius>>

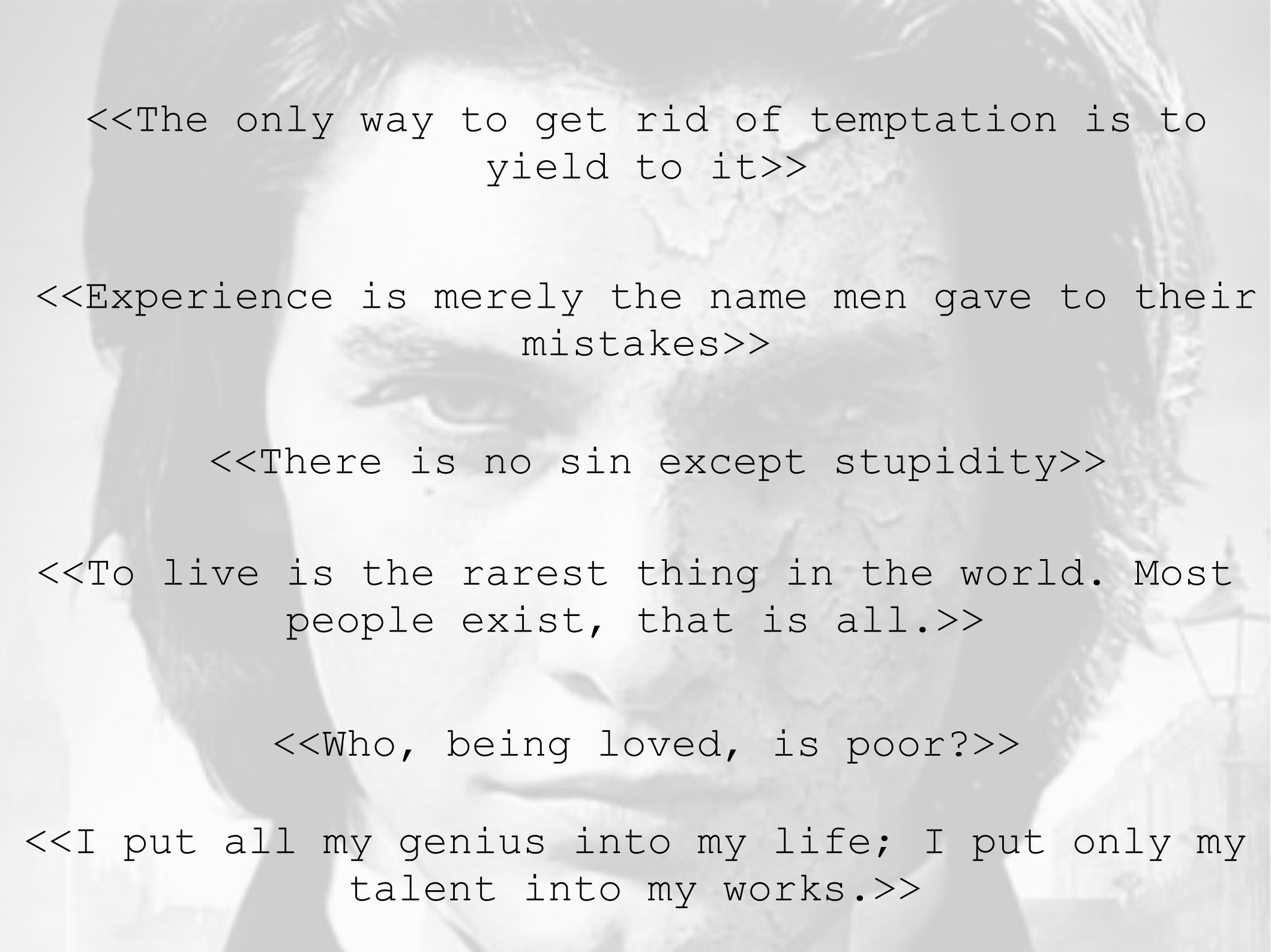
<<Women are made to be loved, not understood>>

<<Never love anyone who treats you like you're ordinary>>

<<Be yourself, everyone else is already taken>>

<<Always forgive your enemies: nothing annoys them so much>>

<<Moderation is a fatal thing. Nothing succeeds like excess.>>



<<The only way to get rid of temptation is to  
yield to it>>

<<Experience is merely the name men gave to their  
mistakes>>

<<There is no sin except stupidity>>

<<To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most  
people exist, that is all.>>

<<Who, being loved, is poor?>>

<<I put all my genius into my life; I put only my  
talent into my works.>>