The "Terrible Moral in Dorian Gray":

A Study of Biblical Redemption

in Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray

Gina M. V. Sathiaratnam

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ABSTRACT

The Picture of Dorian Gray is an extraordinary work in that while it hints at a homosexual subculture, it simultaneously reveals Oscar Wilde’s preoccupation with biblical concepts of sin and redemption. Given his propensity to breach convention, one expects to find Wilde subverting rather than upholding these concepts. As Wilde was hailed the high priest of aestheticism, it is perhaps a mark of his paradoxical nature that The Picture of Dorian Gray should be as Ellmann judges it “the aesthetic novel par excellence, not in espousing the doctrine, but in exhibiting its dangers”.

But it is not merely the dangers of aestheticism that the novel exhibits. There are biblical motifs and overtones in the novel that recall the Genesis account of the Fall of Man, the Divine initiative in providing a Redeemer for sinful man, and man’s freedom to respond to that initiative as he chooses. Man’s choice in Eden was whether he would obey God by observing the boundaries set by Him, or breach them. In The Picture of Dorian Gray, Wilde’s seemingly innocent protagonist, freed from restraints by his adopted creed of new Hedonism, lives a life consecrated to the pursuit of sensations breaching social, moral, and religious boundaries. He does so without discovery mainly because his portrait, like the biblical Passover sacrifice, functions as a scapegoat for his sins. But Dorian Gray’s portrait does not release him from a troubled conscience. This study thus compares Dorian Gray’s attempts to redeem himself against the biblical prescription for redemption.

Wilde said in response to a charge that the book was wicked that there is a “terrible moral in Dorian Gray”. The Bible is used as a theoretical framework to evaluate the moral lessons of the novel and to show, not subversion, but reinforcement of its tenets.
Some of Wilde’s fairy tales and short stories are briefly discussed as these works also reveal his understanding of biblical redemption.
ABSTRAK

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* adalah sebuah karya luarbiasa kerana iannya sama-sama meneka kepada suatu budaya kecil homoseksual sambil menonjolkan kecenderungan Oscar Wilde dengan konsep-konsep dosa dan penebusan dosa yang terdapat dalam kitab Injil. Oleh kerana Wilde dialu-alukan sebagai paderi agung estetisisma, ianya mungkin adalah petanda sifat semulajadinya yang paradoksi di mana *The Picture of Dorian Gray* dinamakan oleh Ellmann sebagai “novel estetika yang teragung, bukan dari segi mengesyorkan ajarannya tetapi dalam mempamerkan bahaya-bahayanya itu”.

membandingkan segala usaha Dorian Gray untuk menebus dirinya dengan preskripsi ajaran kitab Injil untuk penebusan manusia yang berdosa.

Wilde membalas satu dakwaan bahawa bukunya adalah fasik dengan jawaban “ada moral yang mengejutkan dalam Dorian Gray”. Kitab Injil digunakan sebagai rangka teori untuk menilai ajaran moral novel ini dan juga untuk menunjukkan pengukuhan petuapetuanya dan bukan penyelewengan ajarannya. Sebahagian daripada cerita dongeng dan cerpen karyaan Wilde dibincang secara ringkas kerana karya-karya tersebut juga menonjolkan pemahaman Wilde tentang ajaran kitab Injil mengenai penebusan manusia yang berdosa.