

AJPV_LOND: London in literature

Comparison and contrast:

Oscar Wilde: The picture of Dorian Gray

Hanif Kureishi: My Beautiful Laundrette

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I was thinking a lot about the topic for this final paper. However I didn't want to write about sexuality and social taboos, I chose this topic because I think that there is a lot to write about. Two works that I am comparing are the novel *The picture of Dorian Gray* and the film *My Beautiful Laundrette*. I chose the novel *The picture of Dorian Gray* because I read it earlier and it infatuated me a lot. I know that there is also a movie based on this novel but I think that movie can't describe the atmosphere and the feelings as good as the book does. I know that it may seem strange that I am comparing two different works but I believe that there are some similarities as well as differences that I will try to analyse.

I start with some basic information about these works. *The picture of Dorian Gray* is the only novel written by Oscar Wilde. It first appeared in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* in 1890 but it was convicted as immoral. In consequence, Wilde added a preface and several alterations and this new version was published a year after, 1891. On the contrary, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, directed by Stephen Frears from a screenplay by Hanif Kureishi, was released almost one century after, in 1985. I think that this makes one of the biggest difference because however it was also shocking, there weren't any problems with this film. From this, we can recognize the development of the social taboos - in 19th century, when sexuality and homosexuality were mentioned but it was still considered shocking and wrong but it slowly developed and in 20th century, it was accepted and considered almost normal and common and nobody was punished or even arrested for it.

As I mentioned above, both works deal with homosexuality and sexuality in general. In *The picture of Dorian Gray*, the main character is young and beautiful Dorian Gray. His friend and author of Dorian's portrait, becomes infatuated with Dorian, This relationship, we can consider as homosexual. At first, Basil loves everything on Dorian but when Dorian starts to behave selfish and doesn't care about anything but himself, Basil worries about him. But Dorian doesn't feel the same and he only takes advantage of Basil's feelings. We can see the degradation of Dorian's personality and his obsession with his beauty and youth. However, this homoerotic male relationship is a motif in this novel, it stays only with obsession and thinking and nothing really happens between Basil

and Dorian.

On the contrary, the film *My Beautiful Laundrette* goes far. Here, the main character is Omar, a young man, who is starting his own business in laundrette. He meets his old friend Johnny, who helps him with laundrette. Step by step, they start their homosexual relationship. But this relationship is different than that between Dorian and Basil. There are several scenes that are very erotic and homosexual sex is shown there. I think that it is caused by the century, when it was released. But I am not saying that it was not crashing. In my opinion, when audience saw it in the cinema, they were shocked and surprised.

It needs to be said, that there is not mentioned that Omar or Dorian or Basil are homosexuals. My opinion is that they are not homosexuals, they are just both young and handsome men who starts to live on their own. They want to be successful and admired by the others but at the same time, they are against the society and they do everything to break the social rules and norms. And one more thing that is very important - they do everything what they want so I think that they just want to show the others that they can do it and they don't need a permission from the public and even from the government.

But this homosexual relationships weren't the only one in these works. In The picture of *Dorian Gray*, there is explained Dorian's love to Sibyl Vane, a young actress. In *My Beautiful Laundrette*, there is Tania, a young woman who flirts with both Omar and Johnny.

I would like to compare these two works globally, to show the main differences. The picture of *Dorian Gray* is gothic and philosophical novel as opposed to *My Beautiful Laundrette*, which is a comedy-drama. The first is tragic and dark and there are three killings - Sibyl commits suicide, Dorian kills Basil and himself. It ends tragically and shows the period really well - if you behave badly and don't respect the society and its rules, you also end badly. In contrast, the second is rather optimistic and it ends optimistically with scene where Omar and Johnny splashing each other with water and they are topless, which implying that their relationship continues.

To sum up, I picked up these two works to show difference between two centuries. I also

wanted to show that although these works are different, they have something in common: they are both shocking and marked the beginning of new period in literature and films, simply broke social taboos and brought new air. I think that these works won't be forgotten and bring overview of these periods to our future generations.