

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

DIVIDED NATION, DIVIDED SELF:  
REPRESENTATIONS OF ANGLO-IRISHNESS IN CHARLES  
R. MATURIN'S *MELMOTH THE WANDERER* AND OSCAR  
WILDE'S *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY*

by  
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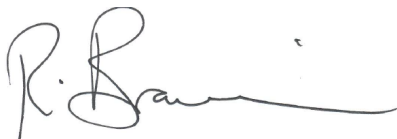
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And to Mher, for believing in me, studying with me, and being there through all the tough times.

# ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: Divided Nation, Divided Self: Representations of Anglo-Irishness in Charles R. Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

In this thesis, two nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish Gothic novels, *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) by Charles R. Maturin and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) by Oscar Wilde, are taken under consideration to study the relationships between history, ideology, and the Subject. The novels are read as expressions of the ambivalence of the Anglo-Irish identity as defined by the dominant ideologies of their respective contexts. The nineteenth century was filled with turmoil in Ireland, with major events like the Act of Union, the Catholic Emancipation Act, the Great Famine and the rise of Irish Nationalism. These historical events occurred at a time of ideological conflict and the colonial dominance of Britain over Ireland. Taking Althusser's theory of ideology and interpellation as the primary theoretical perspective, the study shows the effect of the conflicting ideologies on the Anglo-Irish identity. Through an analysis of the rhetoric, writing style and characters of the two authors, the research shows that the negotiation of identity is a symptom of a dominant colonial ideology that is continuously repressed through acts of denial, escapism and irony.

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## CHAPTER I

### CONTEXTS AND ORIGINS: AN INTRODUCTION

“Every narrative simultaneously *presents* and *represents* a world, that is, simultaneously creates or makes up a reality and asserts that it stands independent of that same reality. Or, similarly, that narrative seems to at once reveal or illuminate a world ... and to hide or distort it” (Dowling 98-99).

*Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), by Charles Robert Maturin, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), by Oscar Wilde, are two of the most important novels in nineteenth-century Gothic literature. The Gothic novel has been studied for its representations of violence in imperial contexts. In its form, the Gothic has recurring tropes like supernatural characters and occurrences, dreams, a return of the repressed, the Gothic double, and more, which these two novels also employ. These similarities, however, are not the only reason these novels are being studied in conjunction. Their differences and the temporal continuities between them are even more revealing, as we shall see. In this thesis, *Melmoth the Wanderer* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* are studied as representations of an ambivalent Anglo-Irish identity that expresses an anxious desire to return to purity. The research shows that the negotiation of identity is a symptom of a dominant colonial ideology that is continuously repressed through acts of denial, escapism and irony. Both novels ultimately show that a return to purity is impossible and an existence in contradiction is the only inevitable reality.

Traditionally, the Gothic mode is characterized by themes of terror, paranoia, and anti-Catholicism – the latter being something Wilde reverses. Jarlath Killeen, in “Irish Gothic: A Theoretical Introduction,” talks about Ireland as a space for the Gothic:



“What is peculiarly ‘Irish’ about the Gothic tradition is that it emerged from a geographical zone which is defined as weird and bizarre. Indeed, Ireland as a whole was identified as a Gothic space” (35). Ireland exists in the “geographical areas deemed marginal to England,” and the Gothic spaces like the attic, tunnels, and the underground, are “spaces on the edge rather than the center” (35). In past literature, both of these novels were read as part of the Irish Gothic tradition (although *Dorian Gray* was sometimes categorized as a British novel by earlier critics). I read both of these novels as Anglo-Irish Gothic works as this hyphenated identity is at the core of my analysis of the two works. The Anglo-Irish identity exists within this space, the not-quite English, slightly off center, and not-quite Irish, not completely off to the West. The Gothic novel as specifically Anglo-Irish presents us with an ambivalence of identity. Killeen writes: “This sense of cultural hesitancy between the future and the past, the real and the supernatural, the Anglo and the Irish, runs through much of the literature of the Protestant Irish” (37).

Although both novels espouse these themes and motifs, they each deal with the Gothic mode differently, a contrast that plays an important role in this project. The Gothic is a space where contradictions can coexist, and in its own world, the Gothic has also been subjected to contradicting modes by our two authors. Diane Long Hoeveler writes, “The Gothic aesthetic anxiously splits ... between an evocation of the religious and feudal past and a glimpse of the emerging secular, between the importance of pre-capitalist human community and the newly modern individual in the public sphere” (“Demonizing” 85). This idea aptly expresses the very scope of my research – where I not only question the splits existing within each novel, but also ultimately, the split

existing between Anglo-Irish Gothic fiction from the beginning to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Charles R. Maturin and Oscar Wilde both come from the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland and carry with them the ideologies and rhetoric associated with Protestantism as well as a connection with Irishness and an Irish identity. This dichotomy is what defines the ambivalence found in the two novels, an ambivalence of identity that is evident in their rhetoric and the doubleness of their characters. The history of the colonization of Ireland by the British is important in understanding the conflicts in ideology and identity that it resulted in, especially for the Anglo-Irish class in Ireland.

### **A. Colonial Origins**

The beginnings of the colonization of Ireland go back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, when Strongbow initially invaded Ireland and Henry II laid claim on Ireland with the aim of making Ireland part of England and taking control of its wealth and resources. Those who went to Ireland from England in search of land and wealth were the first settler colonizers. Although the British attempted to erase the Irish culture, language, and religion, the Irish remained Catholic and set in their culture. The statutes of Kilkenny were laws passed to separate the English from the Irish. The Irish used their Catholicism as a way to resist colonial influence and preserve their identity. According to Timothy J. White, Catholicism became a symbol of political resistance against the British, since British imperialism focused not only on control over Irish territory, but also on controlling the culture and identity of the people (22). In 1609, the Articles of Plantation were passed that aimed to minimize Irish influence and encourage people to be loyal to the crown and Protestantism. In 1649, the Cromwellian conquests began.

The aim was the destruction of the Catholic Irish. The colonization by the British resulted in much of the lands of the Irish to be confiscated, their rights withheld from them and a British identity forced upon them. The Irish rebelled and resisted in many forms, including the 1798 rebellion that took place shortly before the Act of Union of 1801 that placed Ireland fully under Britain's control.

Colonialism is here defined as the control and dominance of one power over the other, not only through control over their lands and resources, but also through ideological control over religion, culture, and language. It is the exploitation of another people and their lands with the aim of economic dominance – often under the guise of “civilizing” or “improving” the colonized people. In the earlier stages, Ireland was seen as potential land to exploit and gain wealth from. Over time, it also became seen as a strategic location for geopolitical threats from other Catholic countries to England. But the ideology of colonialism doesn't stop with expansionism, economic exploitation or military strategy. There was belief that the Irish Catholics were “barbarous” and needed to be “civilized” and converted to Protestantism. The beliefs of the English in reason and science contrasted with the more “emotional” and “superstitious” beliefs of the Catholics of Ireland. The colonizers believed they should impose their way of life and beliefs on the native people, and that they were superior to them.

## **B. The Protestant Ascendancy**

The Protestant Ascendancy was a group of Protestant landowners in Ireland and members of the Anglican church who held minority power over Ireland between the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Ascendancy became dominant as a class following the Cromwellian conquest and the 1652 Act of Settlement which gave the

majority of Irish lands to the Protestant British for plantation. The Anglo-Irish class was unique in that although it stayed Protestant and loyal to the crown, it also sought to have independence from the London parliament and have their own rule over Ireland.

I use the phrase “ambivalence of identity” to describe the state of in-betweenness resulting from contradicting identities coexisting within a subject. In psychology, ambivalence is the struggle to define who you are “amidst different possibilities” (Abbey 333). Here, we read ambivalence as the existence of contradicting aspects of identity within the same subject. It is the struggle to identify oneself as a certain category of identity because other categories contradict it. According to David Hayton, there was a gradual shift in the self-image of the Ascendancy, from its formation to the period of Independence (146-147). The Anglo-Irish Protestant Ascendancy was

caught up between two worlds – England and Ireland – their allegiances to one or the other varied from time to time, and depended on the particular circumstances. Weary of England, the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy was also afraid of the native Irish Catholics, whom they perceived as a threat to their world. The Anglo-Irish parliament, largely dependent on England, tended to the exclusion and marginalization of the Catholic population in stronger terms than the English parliament would have done. (Jorge 45)

Significantly, there were multiple shifts throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries where the Anglo-Irish would change their self-image based on the political context of the time to ensure their preservation and power. While at the start they saw themselves as settlers from England and separate from the native Irish, over generations they developed their own “Protestant Nationalism” aiming to have their own parliament and power in Ireland. It is to be noted that their Nationalism is not the same as Irish Nationalism. They believed they must aim for a “better Ireland” but this was in the

colonial sense of the term, i.e. a more “Protestant” and “British” Ireland. The 19<sup>th</sup> century characterizes more of a decline of the Ascendancy’s power, starting from the Union which they were an opponent of, where they lost their parliamentary power in Ireland, with the English parliament taking control of Irish matters. Following the Act of Emancipation of Catholics in 1829, Catholics began to have their own voice and power in Ireland and the movements and uprisings further impeded the Anglo-Irish from regaining their power.

The decline in the power of the Ascendancy and the rise of Cultural Nationalism coincided: “In response to the cultural devastation that followed the Famine, Irish nationalism emerged as an intimate counterpart to the imperial project, at times reinforcing many of the universalizing ideologies it sought to eliminate” (Scheible 136). Following the Great Famine in Ireland, the Irish population and even some members of the Ascendancy started organizing uprisings against British rule, advocating for independence. We see this shift in the writings of Maturin and Wilde, marked especially by the move from anti-Catholicism to a return to the Catholic faith. At the beginning of the century, Maturin holds anti-Catholic views and although he has a passion for Ireland, it is through the colonial perspective. With Wilde, we will see a significant shift, as Wilde converts to Catholicism at the end of his life after spending his life in the religious “closet.”

### **C. Literature Review**

The selection of the books *Melmoth the Wanderer* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is not arbitrary. The authors of these books have an important connection that will also be an important theme in the analysis: their familial ties. Wilde’s mother, Lady

Wilde, was Maturin's niece, making Wilde his great-nephew. Both Maturin and Wilde come from a lineage of mostly Anglican priests with ultra-Protestant beliefs. Besides the ancestral ties, Wilde is clearly influenced by Maturin and the Gothic genre. The two novels share literary aspects especially being of the Gothic genre, both containing similar themes, like temptation, a supernatural villain, a female victim, questions of morality, ideological influences, and of course, supernatural elements. The greatest motif to be discussed is that of double identity and the splitting of the subject, which the two novels exhibit.

To situate this project in the literary conversations surrounding the Gothic and its implications, we now turn to the existing literature on the two novels. The colonial order has been studied in *Melmoth the Wanderer* more extensively than in *Dorian Gray*. One of the most prominent works is that of Margot Backus, *The Gothic family romance: heterosexuality, child sacrifice, and the Anglo-Irish colonial order*, where she studies the position of the nuclear family in the context of a colonial and imperial social order as depicted in British and Anglo-Irish literature. She argues how in these texts, "the persecution of children, who are sexually and ideologically appropriated, cannibalized, and ultimately destroyed within literal or symbolic families, supplies an allegory for the experiences of the settler colonial child" (6). The focus here is on the familial ideological apparatus that shapes the ideology of the children within the family.

Another work that stands out in finding the colonial in the Gothic is Laura Doyle's "At World's Edge: Post/Coloniality, Charles Maturin, and the Gothic Wanderer." Doyle studies how the characters, like Maturin, are situated in between ideologies, specifically between coloniality and modernity. She shows how "Maturin embeds both a historical critique and a philosophy of world history in his novel" (530)

by looking closely at Maturin's own background as an Anglo-Irish cleric and considering his stance in the colonial history of Ireland. This text in particular will also be applied towards *Dorian Gray* in Chapter Three of this thesis.

On a different note, research has also been done on Ireland's relationship to Britain and other colonized nations, specifically India. Julia Wright, in *Ireland, India and Nationalism in Nineteenth Century Literature*, draws on postcolonial theory and nationalism studies to see how Ireland, colonized by Britain, identifies with India, another postcolonial nation. Wright studies Irish and British writing about Ireland and India, and how these two colonized countries are likened (yet not likened) to each other, in order to "further explore the means by which members of an internal colony might engage public debate in the metropole about political sovereignty, modern nationalism, and the imperial project" (2). Wright reads *Melmoth* as a "colonial gothic" novel (127), seeing the colonial as both part of a national history, and as that which permeates the domestic sphere and genealogical lines (160). This study shows us the global patterns of imperialism through the historical link between Ireland and India, and how this link can be found embedded in the local context of the novel.

Research on Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in the past have mostly focused on decadence, aestheticism, double identity, and queer identity, with psychoanalytical approaches dominating the theoretical methodology. Quite a lot of studies look at the relationship between aestheticism and realism. Shelton Waldrep shows that although seemingly contradictory, realism and aestheticism are bound together, saying "realism ... is just another name for the total aestheticization of everything" (104). In "Oscar Wilde's 'The Picture of Dorian Gray' as Secular Scripture," Virginia Brackett reads religious and classical imagery as a representations

of Dorian's "spiritual journey" (43) that ends in his demise. This, Brackett claims, is the consequence of him choosing realism above all else. The pattern with these readings of *Dorian Gray* is the view that aestheticism is at the root of decadence, the cause of Dorian's self-destruction.

In "The Decadent Subject," Bernheimer shows the impossibility of Dorian to be himself as he exists in the split between Basil's "normative standard," a conscience represented by the portrait, and Dorian's adopted aestheticism as a result of Lord Henry's influences. This double identity trope is usually studied in relation to Wilde's rebelliousness, such as in "A Wilde Irish Rebel: Queerness Versus Nationalism in Irish Imaginative Presentations of Wilde," where Éibhear Walshe studies the tension between Wilde's nationalist rebellion in opposition to his queer rebellion. Wilde's nationalism and Catholic influences are read in conjunction with his queer identity as both of these identities, initially closeted, were later revealed.

Critics have also studied Oscar Wilde's mode of writing in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as a reflection of these dichotomies that are in conflict with each other. Richard Haslam, in "'Melmoth'(OW): Gothic Modes in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*," explores "the artistic consequences of Wilde's engagement with the gothic mode" (304). His claim is that Wilde was trying to reconcile the aesthetic with the satirical mode, the modern with the ancient, and this created tensions between the different modes of the novel. He writes: "the desire to make *Dorian* gothically 'poisonous' interferes with the desire to make it aesthetically 'perfect'" (310). The novel is in conflict with itself between what is moral and what is aesthetic.

While this web of ideologies can be destructive, Alison Milbank sees them as the contrary. In "Sacrificial Exchange and the Gothic Double in *Melmoth the Wanderer*



and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*,” Milbank provides us with a religious reading of the fissured self, and using Girard’s theory on mimetic desire, she argues that the double in the Gothic novel is a redemptive trope. The subject’s desire is defined through the desire of the Other. And if this is so, then according to Milbank, Melmoth attempts to infect his victims with his own desires in order to convince them to exchange their souls. Seeing the other’s likeness to themselves can create a positive mimesis in the characters, so “the double instead is a pharmakos: a redemptive trope in a society of rampant capitalism and materialism, and one which produces instead a spiritual reality” (127). This article is one of few that directly juxtaposes *Melmoth* and *Dorian Gray*.

Recent studies on Oscar Wilde have focused more on his Irish heritage and use of folkloric and Catholic allusions in his works. Jarlath Killeen has been leading much of the recent research on Wilde’s Irish side, with the view that it is precisely Wilde’s Irishness and Catholicism that permeates his writing. This is explored extensively in *The Faiths of Oscar Wilde*, where Killeen argues that Wilde’s Catholic faith underlies much of his writing and informs his aesthetics and politics (18). In *The Fairy Tales of Oscar Wilde*, Killeen shows that Wilde’s short stories for children are heavily influenced by folk-Catholicism and issues faced by the Irish. In agreement to these studies, Joseph McQueen in “Oscar Wilde’s Catholic Aesthetics in a Secular Age,” argues that Wilde’s aesthetic account of reality is drawn from his fascination with Catholic rituals and liturgy (880). These studies are of crucial importance as they inform the understanding of Wilde’s Irish Catholic identity which I will argue is in contradiction with his Protestant lineage and rhetoric.

#### **D. Theoretical Approach and Application**

As is evident from this review of the literature, not many studies have studied *Melmoth the Wanderer* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in conjunction. The ones that refer to both have not studied their relationship in-depth, most of the time simply mentioning the familial relationship between Maturin and Wilde. These two novels share tropes, influences, and significantly, an underlying contradiction in their ideology that will be at the core of this study. What my research can add to the existing conversation surrounding the Gothic is an understanding of not only the underlying ideology of these novels, but how this ideology is reproduced through a genealogical line, shifting its representation based on the historical and literary contexts of each novel.

Our theoretical understanding of ideology is based on Louis Althusser's Theory of Ideology and Theory of Interpellation. In "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," he defines Ideology as "a 'representation' of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (123). Althusser differentiates between Repressive State Apparatuses and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), the latter of which function "by ideology" (111) rather than violence, to enforce the ideas of the ruling class over society. Their purpose is "the reproduction of the relations of production" (117). We can find these ISAs throughout the novels specially in the forms of the church and the family.

In addition, Althusser claims that "*all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*, by the functioning of the category of the subject" (130). The main argument that is central to my research is in this simple formulation: "'you and I are *always-already* subjects" (130). Althusser writes: "Before its birth, the

child is therefore always-already a subject, appointed as a subject in and by the specific familial ideological configuration in which it is ‘expected’ once it has been conceived” (132). Ideology, for Althusser, exists outside of History, which means it is a Necessity in our existence. Therefore, ideology is a “*necessary* illusion produced by the operations of the system itself,” and so “expresses its own kind of truth” (Dowling 82-83). Therefore, ideology is “*essential* mystification: one could not imagine a human society without it” (83). This means that even the denial of an ideology is a necessary part of existing within that ideology. In the novels, the characters attempt to repress one ideology, asserting another in response. But this assertion itself is part of ideology, part of the way the characters view their relation to reality.

When negotiating the contradicting identities of the simultaneously colonizer and colonized, an assertion of one identity is seen as the repression of the other. The system of thought is defined through their contradiction. This repression, in turn, is a reproduction of the dominant colonial ideology through the denial of its violent past. The dominant ideology persists through this denial of History. Identity here is seen as a category as defined by the ideology the individual is a subject of. The subject believes themselves to be freely making a choice in an assertion of an identity, even though the identity is defined only through the framework of the underlying ideology. By making the choice, you’ve given in to the dominant ideology that differentiates between identities as a means of enforcing the superiority of one over the other. The goal in such an analysis isn’t necessarily “liberation” from ideology, but the realization that we are always already inside it.

According to Fredric Jameson, “literature generally, [is] to be subjected to *symptomatic analysis*, a mode of interpretation that reveals (1) the specific ways in

which they deny or repress History, and (2) what, once brought up out of the nether of darkness into the light of rational scrutiny, the History thus denied or repressed looks like” (Dowling 78). Our approach to the text is a search for what is denied in the process of a negotiation of a double identity. The aim is to uncover the repressed ideology that presents itself through symptoms within the text.

The analysis here focuses on literary elements such as character studies, structure, and the themes of ambivalence, concealment, power, and escapism. Both texts question the possibility of a return to “purity” or the “natural” and are met with its impossibility. The texts are contextualized within the history of British colonization of Ireland, the rise of Nationalism, and British Imperialism in the Victorian period. Historical background is used to understand the context and significance of the ideologies and identities negotiated in the texts. In addition, biographical information is used to analyze the authors’ rhetoric and their own identity conflicts.

## **E. Chapter Divisions**

In Chapter Two, I study Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer*, through the ways in which an unconscious colonial ideology is revealed through the text, by studying the identity conflicts of the characters, the colonial ancestry of Melmoth, and the rhetoric of Maturin in his sermons and the novel. Maturin’s anti-Catholicism reveals an unconscious subjection to the Protestant colonial ideology despite his denial of having any political leanings. Chapter Three looks at Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, where Dorian Gray’s indulgence in pleasure and his aestheticism are acts of denial of his violent past. Here, escapism, indulgence, and concealment are forms of repression of a colonial/imperial history and the desire to return to “purity” is met with decay. In both

chapters, the Anglo-Irish identity is represented through the negotiation of identities that aims to make reality more bearable, but ends up reproducing the very conditions that underlie its ambivalence. The conclusion takes a more distanced view of the texts as situated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, looking at the shifts and continuities between the two novels.

## CHAPTER II

### THE UNSPEAKABLE AND UNSIGHTLY IN *MELMOTH THE WANDERER*: UNCOVERING REPRESSED IDEOLOGY IN CHARLES R. MATURIN'S WRITING

Charles R. Maturin presents a view of Ireland in his writing, calling it “the only country on earth, where, from the strange existing opposition of religion, politics, and manners, the extremes of refinement and barbarism are united, and the most wild and incredible situations of romantic story are hourly passing before modern eyes” (*The Milesian Chief* v). Maturin sees Ireland as multilayered, existing in contradictions. But is he describing Ireland as it is, or is he projecting the contradictions in his own identity onto Ireland? The Anglo-Irish identity of the Ascendancy class in Ireland, is described as ambivalent and conflicted, shifting and changing through history and with different contexts. In 1820, Maturin published *Melmoth the Wanderer*, twenty years after the Act of Union that placed Ireland under British rule. In it we will find an image—perhaps of Ireland or of Maturin—that is split between the conflicting ideologies it contains. This Gothic work offers a look into the psyche of Anglo-Irishness at a time of turmoil and political conflict in Ireland.

This chapter aims to study the conflicts in the Anglo-Irish identity through 1) character analyses (in particular, Monçada, Immalee/Isidora, young John Melmoth and Melmoth the Wanderer), 2) what is considered unspeakable or unsightly in the novel and who has access to what is concealed, hidden or isolated, and 3) the ideological background and rhetoric of Maturin himself. Maturin, an Anglican priest, shows the conflict arising between his personal values, his ancestry, and the ideological context in which he is writing. While dealing with the conflicting ideologies of his Anglo-

Irishness, Maturin demonstrates the injustices of a colonial power system while unconsciously reproducing the colonial ideology he is trying to overcome. His anti-Catholicism and advocacy of moderation will be read as unconscious reproductions of the dominant colonial ideology. My ultimate point is that the novel shows the ambivalence and conflict that defines the Anglo-Irish identity in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The tales begin from the 17<sup>th</sup> century and lead up to the year of John's discovery of Stanton's manuscript, in 1816. The dates and contexts hold great significance for our present study as they take place immediately after the Cromwellian conquests and lead up to the years following the Act of Union of 1801. Colonialism, religious discourse, and the literary context provide the background for a thorough understanding of the novel. The tales of the Spaniard and the Indian take up a significant portion of the novel and the settings of these two tales will be studied in detail in relation to the history and context of colonization. These characters come to represent a state of ambivalence in identity that is suggestive of the Anglo-Irish ambivalence of being split between a British Protestant identity and an Irish one. These conflicts are the byproducts of the dominant colonial ideology of British imperialism and the subjection of the characters (and, as we will see, Maturin) to the dominant ideologies of their respective contexts.

I will use Althusser's theory of ideology as a model for understanding how ideologies function both within the novel and outside of it. Althusser defines Ideology as a "representation' of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (123). According to Althusser, while ideology in general is permanent and precedes language and culture, i.e. "has no history" (122), particular ideologies exist materially through Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) whose purpose is the reproduction of the relations of production (117). In *Melmoth the Wanderer*, the

church and the family are two of the social institutions with most influence. The families of Alonzo and Isidora play an important role in enforcing the Inquisition's ideology. Furthermore, a dark history is passed down through the Melmoth family. More so than within the novel, the church and family ISAs are significant when considering Maturin's influences and ideologies.

Althusser's theory of interpellation offers us a useful lens through which we can see the formation of a sense of identity through ideology. Individuals are "interpellated" as subjects of these ideologies and live out what they believe is their role in society: "Before its birth, the child is therefore always-already a subject, appointed as a subject in and by the specific familial ideological configuration in which it is 'expected' once it has been conceived" (Althusser 132). In this sense, the individuals born into each family, whether that's the Monçada family, the Aliaga family, or the Maturin family, are interpellated as subjects of the dominant ideology they are born into.

What complicates this is their own awareness of a split between what they're born into and what they themselves believe. However, this awareness exists in their conception of their Self rather than an awareness that they're a Subject of a dominant ideology. "Self" is distinct from "Subject" in that Self, in the Freudian/Lacanian sense is the consciousness, the way the subject views themselves. In the first part, we will look at the characters in conflict where they believe a conflict exists between their surrounding and their Self, or "nature" as Maturin frequently posits. From Maturin's perspective, the characters are subjects of a particular ideology in their respective context and they perceive their own "nature" or "self" to be in conflict with this subjection. Going further, however, it is made clear that this understanding of one's "nature" is rooted in a Protestant colonial ideology that Maturin himself is interpellated



as a subject of. This is where the analysis will move beyond the pages of the text and into a broader view of the ideologies in conflict at the time of Maturin's writing. While Maturin is aware of the effect of ideology on the individual, he is also unconsciously a subject of the dominant colonial ideology and his ecclesiastical role that is passed down to him through his family lineage.

To give a brief summary, the book starts off with a young John Melmoth going to visit his dying uncle in County Wicklow. Upon arrival he is informed of an ancestor from the 17<sup>th</sup> century who is supposedly still alive. After the funeral, and filled with curiosity, he decides to stay in his uncle's house and investigate. John discovers a portrait of this ancestor, Melmoth the Wanderer, and a manuscript narrating a tale about an Englishman called Stanton who had a strange experience with Melmoth. John learns that Melmoth made a pact with the devil, selling his soul in exchange for 150 years of life. He roams the world in search of someone to replace him in the pact. Following this discovery and seeing the Wanderer himself, John meets Alonzo Monçada, a Spaniard who is the only survivor of a shipwreck off the coast. From this point forward, the main narrator becomes Monçada who tells John about his life in a convent and the prisons of the Inquisition where he was visited by Melmoth and which he eventually escaped with the help of his younger brother. Taking refuge in the basement of a crypto-Jew, Adonijah, he is asked to transcribe a manuscript about an Indian, Immalee – a tale which also contains two others inside of it, that of Guzman's family and the Tale of the Lover.

In "The Tale of the Indian," we read about a woman, the only inhabitant of an island in India, presumed to be a goddess named "Immalee" by outsiders. She is visited there by the Wanderer, who shows her images of the world and its suffering and who

Immalee falls in love with. A few years later, we are transported to Spain during the Inquisition. Immalee is found to be the daughter of a wealthy Spanish merchant and she is now called "Isidora." Here also, Melmoth visits her and they elope. Isidora is discovered when she tries to escape with Melmoth. She gives birth to Melmoth's child and is taken to the prison of the Inquisition where she dies along with her child. Before Monçada is able to continue his narrative, he and John are met with the Wanderer himself who after a night of terror, is dragged over the cliffs of the shore. The only trace left behind is a handkerchief.

#### **A. Gothic Structure and Elements in the Novel**

*Melmoth the Wanderer* contains many traditional elements of the Gothic with its ominous atmosphere, a supernatural villain, a damsel in distress, labyrinths, as well as Gothic themes such as terror, confinement, romance, and more. One of the most discussed elements is the novel's structure. Structure that is interwoven and labyrinthine is deemed a common characteristic of the Gothic mode of writing. The tales are embedded inside each other like Russian dolls, as some critics call it. The common plotline is that of Melmoth tempting each of the oppressed characters to switch places with him and the tales overlap and follow similar patterns. A character finds themselves in a vulnerable situation and is given the choice of an easy way out if they exchange places with Melmoth. Every character refuses the offer, forming the moral subtext of the novel. The literature agrees that the structure plays a role in unraveling the mystery that is Melmoth. For instance, Stott argues that the structure plays a role in how our perception and understanding of Melmoth changes with each Tale. Meanwhile, Null

sees the fragmentation as a reflection of “a world become madhouse in which the characters search, aimlessly and unsuccessfully, for selfhood, sanity, salvation” (137).

It is not quite clear if the structure is intentional as there is some disagreement in the literature. Sharon Ragaz’s analysis of the correspondence between Maturin and his publisher shows how the novel came together and was structured. She says that “the book’s structure derives largely from being pieced together from shards and shreds of manuscript by men working at considerable distance from the author whom they never met, and with only vague knowledge of his intentions and plan” (372). Based on the letters exchanged during this process, each volume was written and printed separately over a few years. Maturin would sometimes send a section of his writing without keeping a copy for himself (369). It is not verified if the structure of *Melmoth* is a deliberate construction because it could very well be a patchwork of tales written over the span of over two years Maturin was working on it. In addition, pressured by the publisher, Maturin had to speed up his writing and omit much of what he wanted to write (367). However, whether intentional or not, the inconsistencies, fragmentation and overlaps in the structure point to instability and ambivalence that characterizes the rest of the novel and characters as well.<sup>1</sup>

## **B. On Maturin**

It is fitting that Maturin writes in the traditional Gothic mode of writing, as the Gothic itself is characterized by an ambivalence. While criticizing certain aspects of

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<sup>1</sup> Note that there doesn’t seem to be any interference on the part of the publisher in the linguistic expression and plot of the novel. The letters suggest that the writing itself, aside from the structure, was purely Maturin’s. Hence, it doesn’t affect the analysis of the rhetoric undertaken here.

superstitious beliefs like those of the Irish Catholics (as in Bidley Brannigan's characterization), Melmoth, a supernatural being, is placed front and center to the novel. This fascination with the unspeakable "evil" of Melmoth is associated with the fear of facing a reality of Maturin's own material existence as part of the Protestant Ascendancy.

Maturin's background can tell us a lot about his aspirations and motivation. Charles Robert Maturin was born in 1780 in Dublin, Ireland, to William Maturin, a clerk in the Irish Post Office. He graduated from Trinity College, Dublin in 1800. Coming from a family history of Anglican clergymen, and persuaded by his father, he followed in those footsteps and, in 1804, became a curate for the Church of St. Peter's in Dublin (Lough 13). His father was dismissed from the post office and the family suffered poverty before he was able to secure another appointment. Since Maturin's curacy at the church paid him only £90 per year, and having to support both his father and his wife and four children ("Rev: Charles Robert Maturin"), his writing was largely driven by financial difficulties. When writing *Melmoth the Wanderer*, he wrote in a letter to his publisher, Archibald Constable, "[L]et me be candid with you—I write for bread—for the maintenance of my family" (qtd. in Ragaz 360). Maturin pursued a career in writing for the stage as he believed this would establish him better and secure him a livelihood. With the help of Sir Walter Scott, his play *Bertram* (1816) was an instant success. However, it led to some tension and prevented any promotion for him in the church because it contained controversial elements (Ragaz 362). Following the success of his play *Bertram*, Maturin tried to follow it up with more writing but found it difficult to secure another major success.

While financial woes were a significant motivator for Maturin, biographers and critics believe his writing was also driven by literary aspirations and religious motives.<sup>2</sup> Maturin's religious aspirations are not hidden at all, as even in his preface, he writes, "The hint of this Romance (or Tale) was taken from a passage in one of my sermons" (5). His aim is to show that one can decide his own salvation, that no matter what suffering one has to endure, they would not choose to give up their salvation. He wrote the novel based off his sermons and beliefs.

Maturin is clearly attached to his Irishness and the Irish identity, but he is also so deeply Protestant that his writing reflects a sort of cultural dissonance. In *Fatal Revenge* (1807), written under an alias, he refers to himself as "an *Irishman* of the name Dennis Jasper Murphy" (vii). According to Robert E. Lougy, Maturin "strongly identified with Ireland's history and fate" (25) and in the preface of *The Wild Irish Boy*, "laments ... the fact that [the novel] does not deal even more with Ireland: 'my heart was full of it, but I was compelled by the laws of this mode of composition to consult the pleasures of my readers, not my own,'" (Lougy 24) the readers here being predominantly British. Maturin had a deep love for Ireland, but was constantly in a struggle between this love, his beliefs, and the expectations of society.

This love for Ireland was fueled by his belief that Ireland could be improved and developed through British standards. Historically speaking, the Anglo-Irish identity shifted, as David Hayton writes, "towards an affirmation of Irishness" (146). From the time the Ascendancy was established to the late 1700s, there was a significant shift in how the Anglo-Irish viewed themselves. While in the 17<sup>th</sup> century they saw themselves as advocates of the "English interest" in Ireland, by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, it had become

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<sup>2</sup> See Kramer and Lougy

common to see themselves as both British and Irish – although, important to note, different than the native Catholic “natural Irish” or “wild Irish” as they called them (150). In relation to the colonial ideology, as we now see it, we can study this perception of identity as a reproduction of the colonial ideology. The Anglo-Irish saw themselves as different and superior to the native Irish, having as a purpose the establishment of a Protestant Irish nation. On the title page of *The Wild Irish Boy*, Maturin quotes Spencer’s *A View of the State of Ireland*: “But if that country of Ireland from which you lately came, be of so goodly and commodious a soil, as you report, I wonder that no course is taken for the turning thereof to good uses, and reducing that nation to better government and civility” (iii). It seems Maturin sees Ireland from this colonial perspective, contrasting between the “wild Irish” as superstitious and prone to emotion, and the English as calculated and rational.

### **C. Anti-Catholicism and Historical Background**

The Gothic imaginary was shaped by the prevalence of anti-Catholic sentiment in British society. The novels of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, up to the time of Maturin’s writing, came at a time of territorial anxiety, where a French or Spanish invasion on Britain was possible and attempted (such as the invasion of Britain by France in 1798). While the Revolution was prominent in France, a movement of reform and opposition was brewing among Irish Catholics. Novels like Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian* (1797) and Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796) contained imagery that depicted Catholicism as violent, hypocritical and barbaric (Hoeverler, “Anti-Catholicism” 8). Maturin uses classic Gothic motifs such as “the collapse of the family unit as bulwark of social order,<sup>3</sup> ... and the

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<sup>3</sup> For more on the Gothic motif of the collapse of the family unit, see Backus.

concomitant motif of religious persecution” (Null 144) following the traditions set by Radcliffe and Lewis. Depictions of religious persecution were mainly centered around the Catholic question and Maturin was following a British Gothic tradition that had established an anti-Catholic sentiment.

In order to understand the forces at play in Ireland, we must first turn to the political climate of Europe in the preceding centuries. This will help us place Maturin in context both historically and ideologically. Here we follow the timeline with the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition, the Reformation era, the French Revolution (and Irish Rebellions), and the fight for Catholic emancipation following the Act of Union.

Much of the novel takes place in Spain during its Inquisition. The Spanish Inquisition was a system, beginning in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, imposed by the state to maintain orthodoxy in Spain. While it was originally established to target heretics in converts from Judaism and Islam, over time it became a tool to control the Spanish population as a whole (Rawlings 47). Inquisitors’ definition of heresy varied but was essentially tied to orthodox norms, behaviors and beliefs.

The Reformation era presented a new challenge, with many European nations converting to Protestantism while Spain and Ireland in particular remained Catholic. While Spain saw Protestantism as a threat to its established power, Protestants viewed the Inquisition as extremist, violent, and barbarous. Queen Elizabeth, “by identifying England as a Protestant nation besieged by predatory Catholic states, especially the powerful Spain, ... was able to unite many of her subjects in support of her rule and the reinstated church of her father and brother” (Pestana 44). Spain was marked as a “predatory Catholic state” out to get England.

There was much propaganda against Spain spanning the entire duration of the Inquisition and whose effect remained even after its abolishment in 1834. Protestant pamphleteers in other parts of Europe promoted the idea of Spain as repressive and intolerant to warn against its possible hegemony over Europe (Rawlings 4). The pamphlets also portrayed the Spanish conquest in the Americas as violent, describing its atrocities committed against the Natives (5). Recent studies have found that punishment, torture and the death penalty were not as common as initially thought and that violence was more prominent in its beginnings in the 15<sup>th</sup> century but not so much in later periods (14). While Maturin's portrayal of the Inquisition is not as extreme as some other works, it still amplifies its brutality and prejudice especially against Protestants, especially in his depiction of how the Protestant Walberg family was treated in Spain.

Maturin's writing is also a criticism of the colonial practices of the Catholic Church. Setting the plot in Spain is of great significance as Spain used the Inquisition for subjugation both at home and in the colonies. The colonial ideologies of Protestants and Catholics varied tremendously, with Protestants taking a more individualistic approach and Catholics taking a more institutional approach. According to Pestana, "church leaders imported the Inquisition to the Spanish colonies as a mechanism to police heresy and extirpate lingering older practices" (62). On the other hand, the British, when they began their colonization of the Americas, "justified their own activity in terms of countering the Spanish Catholic threat. They objected that the Spanish had captured so many souls for an erroneous religious faith" (63). Protestants approached colonialism with a belief in individual freedom and reason, while criticizing the rigid approach of the Catholics.



As we can see, religion is not limited to the individual or even just to home politics. This religious conflict was central to global geopolitics, especially in the context of British and Spanish colonization. Britain needed to set its footing and influence on Ireland because it was a strategic location and potential threat to Britain: “She [Elizabeth] sent troops to complete the conquest of Ireland, which she feared would be used as a staging ground for an invasion by Spain” (Pestana 44). The British tried to prevent this by bringing “Protestantism to Ireland. Resisting conversion to this new faith was a way to shun full cooperation with a conquering power” (52). Catholicism, then, became a tool through which the Irish could resist colonization.

The French Revolution factored into this movement of resistance as “the years after 1789 saw a dramatic expansion of democratic political organization within the Catholic community and a linking of Catholic political demands with ideals which aspired to be unitary and national” (O’Flaherty 65). After the attempted 1798 Rebellion, “some of the movements that would seek separation from Britain were willing to use violence to achieve their goal; 1798 was a landmark for the development of an Irish nationalist psyche” (Cronin 113). The events of the Rebellion gave Irish Catholics a greater sense of unity and would inspire future oppositions.

In 1801, the Act of Union was signed, with the promise for the Catholic Emancipation Act that wouldn’t be passed till 1829. In the years leading up to the Catholic Emancipation, “the British left was willing to give the Irish a greater voice in their own destiny through political reform, and it was sympathetic to equality between Catholic and Protestant peoples and their churches. But Tories were adamant in resisting any changes that might diminish Protestant ascendancy” (Hachey and McCaffrey 32). This resistance on the part of Protestants came in many forms, but

especially through pamphlets and publications, a noteworthy one being Spenser's *A View of the Present State of Ireland* (1596), which was republished after the Union. Writing and periodicals were popular methods of influencing ideologies. The Anglo-Irish Gothic stood somewhere in the middle, anti-Catholic in its views, but also critical towards any power that acted coercively.

#### **D. Maturin's Sermons**

As for where Maturin stands, a clearer view of his ideologies can be found in his published sermons in *Five Sermons on the Errors of the Roman Catholic Church*, published in 1824, four years after the publication of *Melmoth*. His sermons are aimed predominantly towards the Roman Catholics in Ireland, but he also addresses the Protestants in his audience. Although claiming to take a non-political stance driven by his "moderation," the undertones of the sermons can be interpreted as being politically charged and, whether consciously or unconsciously, reinforcing the ruling ideology of the British Protestants. Maturin writes the following regarding the oppression of Catholics and Catholic emancipation: "I interfere not with politics, and readily resign the question to deeper hands than mine" (*Five Sermons* 93). While Maturin denies that any of his writing is political, according to Kramer, he was an "opponent of the Act of Union of 1801" (Kramer 47). As part of the Protestant Ascendancy, Maturin belongs to Ireland's powerful minority, who in the years of the Union were faced with a fear of losing their power and influence in Ireland, especially with the movements towards Catholic emancipation. The Ascendancy class would have been against the Union because their power was undermined when the British Parliament took over Ireland. Without the Union, the Ascendancy would have remained the powerful minority,

especially since the Act of Emancipation was not passed yet. Maturin's writing very much reflects these views and the ruling ideology of his class.

Maturin even goes on to tell the Catholic Irish to "*emancipate yourselves* from the yoke that has pressed on your intellects and your consciences for centuries" (120). Saying something like this to Catholics in Ireland at a time where they were not given the emancipation they were promised is directly a political statement: a subjugation into converting to Protestantism, a direct articulation of the ruling ideology of British colonialism. He even goes on to say: "The shackles of political restraint when once broken, leave no marks; but the iron of priestcraft 'entereth into the soul. 'You are a high-feeling, a high-fated people. Wherefore are ye not a happy, and a free one? — because ye do not *dare to think*" (120). Intellectualism and rationalism are Protestant ideologies, placing thought as superior to superstition. This statement will come up again later in the analyses. When Maturin writes, "say to your priests ... *we will decide for ourselves*" (121), he has a point to make about being awake and embracing reform, but he is also disregarding the freedom taken away from Irish Catholics by the British and through the Union - a freedom that was promised to them but never given.

### **E. Depictions of Catholicism in *Melmoth the Wanderer***

Having established Maturin's views and ideology behind his writing, let's take a look at his depiction of Catholicism in *Melmoth the Wanderer*. The most obvious place we find this is his portrayal of the Spanish Inquisition. In "The Tale of the Spaniard" and "The Tale of the Indian," Monçada and Immalee/Isidora are shown to suffer from the oppression of Catholicism, specifically in the context of the Spanish Inquisition.

In "The Tale of the Spaniard," Alonzo Monçada finds himself imprisoned in a

convent and later in the prisons of the Spanish Inquisition. He tells his story to young John Melmoth after they both survive a shipwreck. Monçada, found injured, is taken to Melmoth's house. Monçada tells John that he is a "descendent of one of [Spain's] noblest houses" but was raised in secrecy apart from his parents (Maturin 73). When he is taken home for his grandfather's funeral, he meets his younger brother, Juan, who is described as "much taller" with "an air of confidence, of conquest" (75). He observes he is being treated differently than his brother and later learns why from his mother: "You are illegitimate,—your brother is not; and your intrusion into your father's house is not only its disgrace, but a perpetual monitor of that crime which it aggravates without absolving" (90). In Spanish Catholic society, an illegitimate child is rejected from birth, and expected, from birth, to be devoted to convent life. Alonzo's mother devoted him to God from before his birth as "the only expiation of [her] crime" (90). Alonzo is "always-already" a subject to this ideology and in this case, he is "always-already" rejected and considered an anomaly in the system: his "destiny was fixed" (91). Interestingly, his mother says to him: "*I relied on your prayers before you could speak*" (90) – confirming that his subjection precedes language.

Monçada is interpellated as a subject of the ideology of the Spanish Inquisition before he is even born. In this sense, he is always already interpellated as "illegitimate" and as a "monk" based on the dominant Catholic ideology of Spain. This idea is emphasized in quite a few instances in the novel, particularly when Alonzo is rebelling against his family's decision to place him in a so-called "Ex-Jesuit convent" (75). The mother's Director plays an important role in the novel, acting as the representation of the hypocritical Catholic Church and Spanish society of the time. Alonzo realizes the Director "governed the whole family" (80) and the latter becomes the main antagonist

to Alonzo's struggle against monkhood. "Your destiny is decided" (87), the Director tells Alonzo, speaking over his father, silencing him. It is implied that the parents don't have much say in their own fates and this ecclesiastical figure holds all power.

Monçada, like certain Biblical figures, is interpellated as a subject of "God" (read: the ideology of the Inquisition), called to be a monk. The assertion, "I am to be a monk" (repeated) is a recognition of his subjection to the ruling ideology. As Althusser puts it so fittingly, he "recognizes that he is a subject, a subject of God, a subject subjected to God, *a subject through the Subject and subjected to the Subject*" (Althusser 134). An assertion of one identity is a way of processing the split (Abbey 333). Because Monçada is conflicted between this subjection and his desire to be free of it, he copes with it by asserting it as if he made the choice himself, giving himself a semblance of freedom. However, we later see that Monçada, although seeming to accept his fate, resists being a monk, and escapes from both the convent and the prison.

For Maturin, this resistance is an argument against the Catholic faith that believes Monçada is hailed to be a monk as a result of the conditions of his birth (rather than this being an individual decision he makes). During an interaction between Monçada and the Director, the Director says: "You are willing to do every thing but what is required of you,—and to sacrifice every thing but your own inclination" (Maturin 82). Here Maturin brings up a central belief in his own faith, having a direct relationship with God: "And the voice of God, echoed from my own heart, bids me not to obey you, by adulterating his service with prostituted vows" (83). Alonzo is driven by a direct connection with God, unlike what the Catholic faith preaches.

Juan, Alonzo's brother, reveals the truth about their household to Alonzo through secret letters he sends through the porter of the convent. His description of the

Director's influence on his family and himself is actually a description of the Catholic Church on a wider scale. "From the first hour I was able to hear and comprehend him, he [Director] poisoned my heart by every channel he could approach" (119). The influence of the Inquisition is seen to be manipulative and power-driven: "The basis of all ecclesiastical power rests upon fear" (118). In his letter, Juan writes: "My nature, proud, generous, and fiery, had not yet quite emancipated itself from the influences of the Director, but every effort it made pointed, by an indescribable impulse, towards you" (122-123). These words ring familiar if one has read Maturin's sermons, and here, too, Maturin places the responsibility upon the individual to separate themselves from the grip of ideological control.

Maturin's criticism of Catholicism is centered mainly around the contrast between "nature" and "habit," but also the hypocrisy of convents and ecclesiastical leaders. The monks in the convent are described as "hypocrites" (77) and "hypocritical wretches" (93). Maturin shows that while the religious leaders are enforcing piety, they themselves are merely performing their belief. He refers to their rituals as performances multiple times and likens the convent to a stage, calling it an "act," "performance" or "drama" (165). The most significant criticism, especially of the superstitious nature of their rituals, is when an alleged miracle is revealed to be fake. When Monçada shares his doubt about his fate to be a monk with another monk, Monçada says he will never accept the conventual life "unless this fountain is dried up, and this tree withered, by tomorrow" (103). Sure enough, the next day they find the fountain dry and the tree withered. This convinces Alonzo to accept this fate, that is until the monk confesses, on his deathbed, that he "performed that miracle [him]self," using "chemical secrets" and by emptying the fountain reservoir overnight (113). The so-called "miracle" is shown to

be a farce and an illusion. While the Gothic work itself has a fascination with the supernatural and superstitious – after all, Melmoth himself is a “preternatural” being – Maturin elevates a rhetoric of Protestant rationalism in order to criticize the “irrational” religion of Catholicism.

Maturin showcases the battle between what he calls “nature” and religious system in “The Tale of the Indian,” where we meet a young woman, Immalee, living alone on an isolated island in India. The isle, although having an associated mythology about the goddess “Seeva,” is described as having been abandoned for nature to overtake it: “The island, thus left to itself, became vigorously luxuriant, as some neglected children improve in health and strength, while pampered darlings die under excessive nurture” (273). Maturin describes the island as free from humanity’s destructiveness – as pure as it can be, untouched. In the same way, Immalee is depicted as the purest possible being, again, untouched. She is a child of nature: “The sun and the shade—the flowers and foliage— ... the peacocks ... and the loxia ... all these were her friends, and she knew none but these” (280). We soon learn that Immalee is the child of a Spanish family who lost her during their travels in India. Immalee’s Tale starts with the Stranger visiting her frequently at the island, and later moves to Spain where Immalee has been found and lives with her Catholic family who have given her the name “Isidora.” The first part of the Tale brings up questions about access and purity, while the second part gives us an image of the conflict Immalee/Isidora undergoes living under the rule of the Spanish Inquisition.

First, we will look at the latter – the conflict Immalee/Isidora experiences and the role of her mother Donna Clara, who represents the family as social institution which in turn acts as an apparatus to reproduce the ruling ideology of the Inquisition. In

this ideology, Isidora is interpellated as a “Spanish female and a Christian” (349) – a Christian as defined by the Catholic Church in Spain. In the letter to his wife, Isidora’s father lays out what he expects Isidora to have become as a Christian Spanish maiden: “I trust that ... she is now become as complete a Catholic in all points necessary ... as becomes the daughter of an old Christian such as I ... Moreover, I expect to find her, as a Spanish maiden should be, equipped and accomplished with all the virtues pertaining to that character, especially those of discretion and reserve” (369). The ideology of the Inquisition dictates these characteristics as appropriate and anything different as heresy. A woman of her own mind and thoughts is not acceptable here.

Maturin uses the character of Donna Clara to criticize the Catholic Church, predominantly through her effect on Immalee/Isidora. Donna Clara is frustrated with Immalee’s untamed nature, and more so by Immalee’s assertion that “religion ought to be a system whose spirit was universal love” (333). Donna Clara plays an important role in enforcing the dominant ideology on Isidora. Upon being returned to Spain, Immalee finds it difficult to adjust to the rigid society of the Spanish Inquisition: “Her singular destiny seemed to have removed her from a physical wilderness, to place her in a moral one” (331). “Moral [wilderness]” implies that to Immalee, it is outside of her comfort and nature to be in an ideologically charged atmosphere. Her relationship with Melmoth becomes the sanctuary for her “pure” and “thinking” self while her mother enforces a system that feels unnatural to her. As she tells Melmoth during a visit, “I am truth. I am Immalee when I speak to you,—though to all others in this country, which they call Christian, I am Isidora” (348). In Spain, she is *hailed* as Isidora, while retaining her initial identity as Immalee. Immalee/Isidora is conflicted between thought and duty, freedom and laws, self and society. Maturin uses the night and day as the



contrast representing Isidora's internal conflict: "In the day-time she was silent, pensive, abstracted, feeding on thought—with the evening her spirits perceptibly though softly rose, like those of one who has a secret and incommunicable store of delight" (356).

Maturin wants to show that Catholicism is not the true Christianity while Protestantism, in particular the Church of England, is the best and "purest" form of belief. Melmoth asks Isidora: "Do you know that the Christianity of these countries is diametrically opposed to the Christianity of that world of which you caught a gleam, and which you may see recorded in the pages of the Bible, if you are permitted to read it?" (344). Although the speaker here is Melmoth, Maturin is pinning Catholicism as Christianity that doesn't follow the Bible and is therefore not the true religion. In "Sermon II," in which he questions certain aspects and beliefs of the Catholic Church, he says that the Church of England "approaches nearest to the standard" of purity and "the true Church" (*Five Sermons* 31). On the one hand, he says that any believer under any denomination belongs to this "true Church," but goes back to the Church of England as the closest possible thing to this ideal: "When, after long wandering through mazes of error, obscurity, and contradiction, I inhale once more the genial and native air of the Church of England, breathing in her sound and *Scriptural* articles, I feel like one, who after a weary voyage has touched the shore at length" (56). His sermons show us that his ideal of purity seems to exist mainly through the English Protestant church, and is not a universal ideal as he would like us to believe.

## F. “Spirit of Moderation”

Further analysis shows us that this black and white approach is misleading in the broader question of colonialism and imperialism that Maturin does not seem aware of. He is so caught up in the question of Catholicism as a contrast to a “purer” faith that he doesn’t realize that this idea of “purity” is itself tied to ideology. Maturin holds the belief that the Truth as defined by Protestantism is the absolute truth and his beliefs are ultimately objective. Maturin’s perception is limited by his acceptance of categories of his belief as “universal categories of human nature” (Dowling 106). Maturin’s mind exists inside of History and allows him to accept the interpellation of his characters as a Necessity. He operates within the limits of the ideologies of the colonial order of the time.

If we read more into his description of Immalee, we discover an unconscious expression of the dominant colonial ideology. Immalee and the Isle are repeatedly described as “mild” and the ideal religion as having a “mild and peaceful spirit— ... quietness and resignation” (306), similar to the “spirit of moderation” (*Five Sermons* 124) advocated by Maturin in his sermons. Immalee, in her purity, represents a “milder theology” (*Melmoth* 277). She chooses the “pure” version of Christianity, i.e. Protestantism, when presented with the different religions of the world by Melmoth. Moderation means submission and resignation, a contrast to radicalism. So by advocating for mildness, Maturin, whether consciously or not, is contributing to the preservation of the colonial order, and is preventing a potential uprising by the Irish Catholics against Protestant rule. His move towards moderation is a move away from any kind of revolution or change – so it’s not so much about a universal faith as it is an argument *for* Protestantism which is within the limits of the religious and political

rivalry between Catholicism and Protestantism that is itself within the limits of a colonial ideology that is perceived to be a necessary reality.

### **G. Melmoth the Colonizer**

This colonial ideology is not one completely lost on Maturin. It can be argued that he attempts to criticize the colonizer as well. It is, of course, significant that the Wanderer's portrait is dated 1646 (26). Cromwell arrived in Ireland in 1649: "The first of the Melmoths, ... who settled in Ireland, was an officer in Cromwell's army, who obtained a grant of lands, the confiscated property of an Irish family attached to the royal cause. The elder brother [i.e. Melmoth the Wanderer] of this man was one who had travelled abroad, and resided so long on the Continent, that his family had lost all recollection of him" (26). Young John Melmoth's ancestors were firstly colonial settlers, and the house that John has now inherited was originally taken from the native Irish residing there.

Applying the hypothesis that Melmoth represents the colonizer, we can read many of his supernatural characteristics as representations of the colonial ideology. In the context of the book, Melmoth transcends the physical limitations of a human. He has access to places he shouldn't otherwise have access to, such as Stanton's asylum, Monçada's convent, the prisons of the Inquisition, Immalee's isle, and more. The colonizer enters the land of the colonized by giving himself the authority to do so. Additionally, Melmoth has knowledge to things like eye witness accounts of historical events that he wouldn't otherwise have if he hadn't lived through those times. The colonizer believes himself to be more educated and more "civilized" and "knowledgeable" than the people he colonizes. Melmoth imparts knowledge to Immalee

on the isle and teaches her about the world and its religions. He imposes himself on the isle, starts educating Immalee and makes her dependent on him.

Knowing that Melmoth represents the colonizer, we can see his relationship with Immalee as a colonial one. Immalee's first encounter with Melmoth on the isle can be read as an analogy of the colonization of another Isle, Ireland. We can see this analogy in Melmoth's ability to access the isle, hold power over its inhabitant Immalee, and act as a "civilizer" in some sense. In the introduction to the Tale, we don't get a glimpse of Immalee. We can only hear the "sweet sounds" and "notes angelical" coming from the island (274). Her beauty and purity are hidden and inaccessible to the people from neighboring isles. The purity of Immalee is unreachable. Ireland was frequently described as "pure" and "barbaric" by early colonial texts and this view remained popular for many centuries to come. Melmoth is able to take over Immalee's mind and distort her view of reality. He brings with him knowledge and ideology that is meant not to educate Immalee, but to hold control over her. Colonization was frequently justified as necessary to "help" the colonized become "civilized" and "educated."

The scene on the isle is an allegory of the original sin, the isle being the Garden of Eden and the "Stranger" representing the serpent coming to tempt Eve, i.e. Immalee. While Maturin's initial intention is to preach against the corruption of the soul by the devil, Melmoth's position as colonizer complicates the impression we get from this scene. Immalee, described as the purest form of a human, upon meeting Melmoth, "tasted of the tree of knowledge, and her eyes were opened" (308). Melmoth has "distorted" her view of reality. This "distortion" can be read as the introduction of ideologies into Immalee's untainted mind. Perhaps similar to Lacan's Mirror Stage, Immalee has now become aware of her own existence and the question of right and

wrong is bearing down on her. This is symbolized by Immalee's change in how she perceives darkness: "To her, light and darkness had hitherto been the same"(313) but with the approaching night, "Nature ... announced danger to her children" (314).

Immalee's introduction to this knowledge is part of Melmoth's colonial efforts to "civilize." And Melmoth has control over how this happens. Immalee herself doesn't have access to the outside world, but Melmoth who has traveled does. In fact, Immalee needs a *tool* to see beyond the horizon – the telescope that Melmoth shows her. What's more, the person who has the key/pass to show her is someone who has powers to override the human limitation of what we can and cannot *see*, how we *perceive* - and, what we can *access*. Melmoth is in full control here of what ideologies and ideas Immalee will learn of and how she will think of the world.

Another theme that indicates the colonial power of Melmoth held over Immalee is the relationship between language and power. A lack of language is an indication of the powerlessness in Immalee. When Melmoth is taking Isidora to get married, Isidora is in fear but "...unable to utter a word that might implore him to stay" (391). Melmoth states: "You are in my power,—absolutely, hopelessly in my power" (388-389). Isidora finds herself in the dark, unable to discern where she is and who she is with. Melmoth and Isidora are married by an undead priest. "The place, the hour, the objects, all were hid in darkness ... she tried to catch certain words, but she knew not what they were,— she attempted also to speak, but she knew not what she said" (394). Power is taken away from Isidora. She is silenced and refused a say in the union. Melmoth here assumes the position of a colonizer.

This marriage, in turn, is a corrupt union, just as the Act of Union of 1801. Jim Hansen writes, "the novel allegorizes the uneasy intimacy between the colonizer and the

colonized as a potentially beneficial and constructive confrontation between the civil and the natural” (358). The Act of Union was depicted by Unionists as a marriage between Ireland and England, with the image of England as the powerful male and Ireland as the helpless female (Hansen 355-356). Hansen goes on to argue that this relationship expresses a conflict and anxiety in Anglo-Irish power, an *ambivalence*, in the Anglo-Irish identity. Even though the approach towards colonialism is critical, it originates from an underlying repressed guilt, and a question of identity.

#### **H. Ambivalence in Identity**

Then where do we see this ambivalence and conflict in the character of Melmoth the Wanderer? At the start of the novel, Maturin gives the impression that Melmoth is a ghostly figure, as Biddy Brannigan seems to believe: “he was never heard to speak, seen to partake of food, or known to enter any dwelling but that of his family” (27). This account suggests more of a ghostly haunting of the family than what we later come to see Melmoth is. A few days later, young Melmoth wakes up from what is assumed to be a dream to see his wrists “black and blue, as from the recent gripe of a strong hand” (60). According to Stott, this suggests that the Wanderer is not a ghostly figure but rather has at least a material human form (44-45). Later on, we learn that the Wanderer actually died and his existence is described as “posthumous and preternatural” (Maturin 500). Melmoth is neither dead nor alive, nor is he both dead and alive. He seems to embody an existence made up of two contrasts: death and life. This state of being is seen elsewhere in the novel, in the form of the undead hermit that marries Melmoth and Isidora. So, Melmoth comes to represent an ambivalence in his state of existence. He

possesses a double “identity,” as one with supernatural abilities but in a living human form.

In addition to Melmoth’s state of existence, his character also has some conflicting characteristics. He is not a black-and-white villain that only exerts terror towards people; rather, he is in some instances, humanized and shown to have softer emotions. During his conversation with Immalee on the isle, Immalee’s innocence seems to awaken human compassion in him: “an emotion new to himself agitated him for a moment,—then a smile of self-disdain curled his lip, as if he reproached himself for the indulgence of human feeling even for a moment” (309). Melmoth even warns Isidora’s father of the danger he himself has placed her in: “There is an arm extended to seize her, in whose grasp humanity withers! ... it releases the victim for a moment,—it even beckons her father to her aid! ... lose not a moment to save your daughter!” (503). Afterwards, it is shown that he is gentler with Isidora after he learns of her pregnancy (511). So while he is initially depicted as the embodiment of the devil, we learn that he himself is conflicted with that subjection.

In fact, even his seemingly overpowering authority can be questioned. While Melmoth is conveyed as a sort of all-powerful villain, he might not be that powerful to begin with. Melmoth is cursed to tempt and terrorize Isidora but is in conflict with what he is summoned to do. Where he is described as “posthumous and preternatural,” it is when Elinor in “The Lover’s Tale” is questioning “by what means he is thus enabled to continue” this existence (500). Stott speculates that this is also the reason why Melmoth asked Immalee if she ever heard music before his appearances. He suggests that if Melmoth was in control, he would have known if music was heard or not. This means that another one in power is controlling the music. And if we read closely, Melmoth is

“damned” to roam the Earth in search of a soul to replace him in his deal. He *willingly* tries to warn Isidora’s father of the danger his daughter is in. He is *cursed* to tempt and be the servant of the Devil. Thinking back on the idea of an ideology underlying Melmoth’s identity and actions, we see that Melmoth is himself a subject of the Ideology of the “Devil.” He is forced to reproduce this ideology by finding people who will sacrifice their souls and take his place. Melmoth is a victim himself, and the doubleness in his existence is his split identity. He is cursed to keep on living even though he is “dead” in order to keep the “ideology” alive.

The Melmoths’ colonial background is significant in understanding Maturin’s identity conflict. His attempt to criticize colonial power is rooted in a need to negotiate his own identity. Maturin’s characters exhibit the ideological conflicts Maturin experiences, but there is one character who seems to represent Maturin himself best: Young John Melmoth. John Melmoth’s storyline can be read as a metaphor for Maturin learning about his own ancestral history and an attempt to come to terms with it. From the outset, John is the receiver of information. The tales of Melmoth’s wanderings are revealed to him through several channels, including the old Sibyl, the manuscript, and Monçada. He is the one who has access to the history and as the inheritor, represents the future of his family lineage. Maturin himself is descended from French Huguenots who were allowed to settle in Ireland following the Act of Settlement in the late 17<sup>th</sup> – early 18<sup>th</sup> century which led to the formation of the Protestant Ascendancy class. He comes from a lineage of Protestant clergymen and followed suit himself when he became an Anglican priest in the Church of Ireland. Maturin’s ancestors were persecuted themselves for being Protestant, but ended up part of the Protestant Ascendancy class in



Ireland, i.e. the colonial settler class who held concentrated power over the majority Irish Catholic population.

It is implied that Uncle Melmoth is the last family John had left and with the Wanderer gone it is in John's hands to carry forward and change the course of history. It is implied that without consent, young Melmoth does not have to carry over the burdens of his ancestry. His uncle asks him to burn the manuscript and get rid of any trace of the Wanderer (21). John Melmoth can erase all the traces of this colonial past if so he chooses. It is as if Maturin himself is faced with the dilemma of denying this history and changing course towards something different.

Despite all this, the uneasy ending of the novel gives a different impression. The handkerchief at the end is a trace left behind by the Wanderer. He is not completely gone. There is a symptom of his existence left behind – something from the past still left in the present. The fear and mystery is still there, only repressed, gone back to a hidden place that is unreachable, and replaced by what is essentially social reality – the ideology we take comfort in. John Melmoth “returning home” after “exchanging looks of horror” is indicative of the pleasure principle.<sup>4</sup> He is repressing the anxiety that is represented by the Wandering Melmoth and clinging to a social reality. He is leaving it behind in the depths of something inaccessible, no longer attempting to follow it or solve the mystery behind it. There is no real resolution, and that is the point. Ultimately, it is an unbreakable cycle. Once the “purity” is tainted, it cannot be regained. Ideology and its influence always leave a *trace*, like Melmoth's handkerchief, like the house inherited by John. And young John Melmoth himself is the continuation of the

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<sup>4</sup> “Pleasure principle” is here understood from Freudian psychoanalytic theory.

genealogical line. He carries with him the name of Melmoth, the name *John Melmoth*, a constant reminder of his familial past and the burden he carries.

## **I. Reproduction of Coloniality**

This trace is carried over in the unconscious expressions of the colonial ideology, also passed down through the generations. While Melmoth represents a horrifying colonialism and exploitation, and Maturin is horrified by the actions of his ancestors, he still believes the Catholic Church is worse. Ashley Marshall argues in “Melmoth Affirmed” that Maturin’s writing is a criticism of the “social imposition of religion” (121) and the true antagonists are the perpetrators of this imposition. While Melmoth tempts, he doesn’t coerce. As Marshall puts it, “Melmoth exposes rather than embodies the threats to humanity” (126). He says of himself “I have been on earth a terror, but not an evil to its inhabitants” (Maturin 537). Meanwhile, the figures representative of the institutions of the church and family, like the Director and Donna Clara, are depicted as coercive, manipulative and exploitative – the true villains in the tales. Access and agency are taken away by the Catholic Church. Not even Melmoth refuses access to his victims. He doesn’t force anyone to give in and he is not the one who puts people into the situations he finds them in: “None can participate in my destiny but with his own consent” (537). If we are to take Melmoth as the Protestant settler colonialist, Maturin is ultimately saying that Melmoth is not the villain, i.e. colonization is not the problem, the Catholic Church is. He is implying that the people can be free if only they converted to Protestantism, if only they gave up Catholicism. While Maturin believes this to be the true source of suffering, he is unconsciously justifying the exploitation undertaken by someone like Melmoth – or the colonizer.

Instead of advocating for equality and equal rights independent of religious denomination, he has fallen victim to the ruling colonial ideology and is feeding the discourse that fuels the feud between the two religions.

In the end, the novel is not so much a representation of Ireland, but rather a representation of Ireland *as represented by Maturin*. It says more about the conflicted identity of the Anglo-Irishman who is trying to reconcile his colonial ancestry with his love of Ireland but is still very much caught in the bounds of a dominant colonial ideology. This shows us the conflicts arising as a result of colonization and identity conflict. We will see that this influence does not fade away and the chaos gets more chaotic, especially in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, as we will see in the next chapter. Authors and characters alike are attempting to assert an identity, or make sense of the one they are given, only to end up with multilayered, hyphenated identities, built up from their past, present and future selves – with no way of returning to purity. The violent past always comes back to haunt the present and future.

## CHAPTER III

### CONCEALMENT AND FORGETFULNESS AS REPRESSION IN OSCAR WILDE'S *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY*

Seventy years after Charles Maturin's publication of *Melmoth the Wanderer*, his great-nephew would publish another Gothic novel that would be the subject of criticism, analysis and praise for years to come. With its new aesthetic philosophy and nationalist undertones, it was a far stretch from the Protestant literary heritage it came from. Oscar Wilde first published *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in 1890, around the same time Irish cultural nationalists were organizing to resist the influence of British culture in Ireland. In order to understand the Gothic fiction of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and its differences from the earlier novels, we need to see what changes happened in Ireland and Britain during that gap. Between the years of Maturin's writing and Wilde's writing, the Catholic Emancipation Act was passed in 1829, the Great Famine occurred in the 1840s, and a Nationalist movement began to rise following these events.

Following the famines in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland, "an increasing number of Irish political activists reasoned that the only way a prosperous and secure future could be attained for Ireland was through self-government" (Cronin 144-145). The events of the 19<sup>th</sup> century gave further rise to conflicts between Irish Nationalists and Unionists. In 1845, the Young Irelanders split from O'Connell, advocating a rebellious approach and a "co-religious Irish Nation" (134). While through most of the centuries the Anglo-Irish class had been adamant on preserving their power, many of the members of the Ascendancy began to advocate for an independent Ireland built on an Irish identity, creating a greater rift within the class itself. Wilde's mother was a big influence on Wilde in this regard, having also joined the resistance movements in the 1840s. Both his

parents were interested in folk-Catholicism and the folk culture of the Irish, a move that could be a response to the British influence on Irish culture: “The Irish language disappeared from everyday use ... Popular forms of entertainment, social behavior and customs were increasingly drawn from British experience” (Cronin 165). The effect of British presence was a repression of the culture of Ireland and the daily life of the Irish was altered as a result of laws, power and the consequences of the famine.

In the 1880’s, the Irish Nationalists began organizing, beginning with cultural changes. David Pierce’s “Cultural Nationalism and the Irish Literary Revival” explores the ways in which the Irish literary movement after the 1880s expressed Irish cultural nationalism. He says that “language and culture provided the driving force behind claims to nation status” (13). Wilde’s writing is a form of nationalism itself, where his belief in an independent Ireland and Irish culture is the driving force behind his works.

Coming from a Protestant lineage, and born into the Ascendancy, Wilde exhibits a certain anxiety in his writing between an awareness of coloniality and a desire to overcome the burden of the past. Laura Doyle defines post/coloniality as the in-between state of consciousness preceding postcolonialism, characterized by the contradictions between coloniality and modernity (518). While Doyle applies the concept to *Melmoth the Wanderer*, I’d like to extend this application to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. With *Melmoth*, we saw the anxieties of the Protestant Ascendancy arising from the ongoing resistance to colonization, the movement towards Catholic Emancipation and the threat to their power and influence in Ireland. With *Dorian Gray*, we see these anxieties expressed indirectly in the form of resistance which I read as a symptom of an unconscious subjection to the colonial ideology. Wilde’s desire to be Irish, to be

Catholic, is here seen through this lens of post/coloniality; it is an attempt at joining the resistance out of an anxious desire to erase or reverse the violence of colonization.

While in *Melmoth the Wanderer* we were in the land of the colonized, in Ireland with John Melmoth hearing the tales of Melmoth's wanderings, with *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, we are transported to England, "the native land of the hypocrite" (Wilde 105), as Harry calls it. We are now in the center of the very essence of the dominant colonial (capitalist) ideology, the English upper class. Funnily enough, the tables have turned, and while with Maturin the hypocrites were the leaders of the Roman Catholic church, here, Wilde is pointing the same finger towards the British. Our aim in this chapter is to explore this shift in perspective and rhetoric, so as to see where the Anglo-Irish identity has found itself in this latter period of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Of course, this finger-pointing is a sign of self-awareness that will prove to be important in our study of the denial of history. In the novel, Dorian Gray finds himself negotiating a double identity, attempting repeatedly to deny a "sinful," violent history. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* represents this denial and repression of a violent past in many forms, such as the negotiation of a double identity, escapism through indulgence in pleasure, or the literal concealment of evidence of past crimes. In this chapter, I will study the ways in which an ambivalent colonial identity is negotiated, embraced, or denied, while the search for a fixed self, or a return to purity is met with the realization that there can only be decay.

Alongside Althusser's definition of ideology and the process of the reproduction of a dominant ideology, Fredric Jameson's understanding of ideologies as "strategies of containment" will allow us to see how the characters' philosophies and actions act as tools for repressing revolution and change, leading to their unconscious participation in

reproducing coloniality. As Dowling explains, Jameson sees ideology “not merely as limitation, a premature closing-off of thought to the truth about History, but as the *repression* of those underlying contradictions that have their source in History and Necessity. What Jameson gives us, in short, is an idea of History intolerable to the collective mind, a mind that denies underlying conditions of exploitation and oppression” (77-78). Wilde’s text unconsciously participates in a denial of history by betraying its own anxieties about the ideologies it seeks to overcome.

To better understand the ambivalence in Wilde’s own identity, we now turn to his upbringing and later influences. Oscar Fingal O’Flahertie Wills Wilde was born in Dublin on 16 October, 1854 to Sir William Wilde, an ear surgeon, and Jane Francesca Elgee, a writer, also known by her pen name Speranza. Wilde’s parents were part of an elite circle of intellectuals and were themselves quite well-known and influential. He went to Magdalen College, Oxford, where he grew interested in the writings of Walter Pater, who along with John Ruskin would be great influences in Wilde’s Aestheticism. In 1890, after having already established himself as a writer in literary circles, he published *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which received negative reviews for its homosexual insinuations. He revised and republished the book in 1891, with the added Preface with the assertion that “there is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book” (3). He was later found guilty “for gross indecency” and sent to prison in Reading Gaol, where he wrote *De Profundis*. After his release, he went into exile in Paris, adopting the name Sebastian Melmoth, “a name which combined both Wilde’s ultra-Protestant past ... and his Catholic future” (Killeen, *The Faiths* 39). On his deathbed, he was baptized into the Roman Catholic Church.

In *The Faiths of Oscar Wilde: Catholicism, Folklore and Ireland*, Jarlath Killeen studies Oscar Wilde's writing as inspired by his Catholic inclinations. Killeen claims that "the writings of Oscar Wilde can fruitfully be analyzed as expressive of an Irish Catholic heritage," (1) which he claims to be Wilde's "true" identity even though he is descended from a Protestant heritage. Wilde's parents, while being part of the Protestant Ascendancy class in Ireland, were both attracted to Catholicism and Irish nationalism. Wilde's father, William Wilde, although not as nationalistic as his wife, was interested in Irish folk-Catholicism and would frequently take Oscar Wilde along to his anthropological expeditions in the west (Killeen, *The Faiths* 8). Lady Wilde was more nationalistic and even took part in the Young Ireland Movement in the 1840s, much to the surprise of her family (2-3). She advocated for an independent Ireland, separate from England both politically and culturally. While Oscar Wilde's lineage and family was from a Protestant tradition, his parents instilled an Irish identity in him from a young age.

Wilde was surrounded by these ideas and met, from a young age, Irish intellectuals who promoted Irish cultural nationalism: "These figures included not only other members of the Young Irelanders and the Royal Irish Academy but also Isaac Butt, the leader of the Home Rule Party. Both Speranza and Sir William were supportive of the Home Rule Movement, and Oscar Wilde would himself become a strong proponent of the man who would lead that movement during the 1880s and early 1890s, Charles Stewart Parnell" (9). Parnell, "despite his American mother, his Protestant upbringing and his Cambridge education, ... had decided to lead the Irish struggle" (Hyam 170), similar to Wilde's experience.



Killeen discusses Wilde's upbringing to argue "that it is a specifically (though not exclusively) Irish Catholicism which pervades Wilde's writings" (*The Faiths* 18). Killeen shows awareness and consideration towards Wilde's other identities, but chooses to focus mainly on the Catholic aspect, going so far as to claim that it is the main underlying aim in most of his writing. While the book offers great insight into Wilde's Catholic side, my research takes into consideration the inevitable split that occurs with such mixed identities and therefore, my claim is not that Wilde is writing from a Catholic perspective, but rather navigating the conflicts in his identity as they battle between the conflicting ideologies he was born into and grew up with. Moreover, my study looks at Wilde's writing through a wider lens of the conflicting ideologies existing in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland, with the rise of Nationalism in the years leading up to the Independence.

I view Wilde's assertion of a Catholic identity as a symptom of an inability to overcome the conflicts he is undergoing as a result of his upbringing, lineage, and beliefs. This assertion of an identity over others is a coping mechanism to process a ruptured self. This is in line with Jameson's understanding of repression as the denial of an intolerable History. We see multiple instances of denial, concealment, and repression in *Dorian* primarily, but also in the idle and indulgent culture of the upper class the main characters represent. Lord Henry's philosophy represents a desire to repress, deny and bury the past: "The one charm of the past is that it is the past" (Wilde 72). Dorian adopts this same philosophy in his life in an attempt to conceal his past: "If one doesn't talk about a thing, it has never happened. It is simply expression, as Harry says, that gives reality to things" (76).

The book starts off in Basil's studio, where we are introduced to the artist, Basil, and his friend Lord Henry. Basil is painting the exquisite and youthful Dorian Gray whom he is obsessed with. When Lord Henry meets Dorian, he manipulates him into wishing to exchange places with the portrait that will remain beautiful while he ages and loses his beauty. His wish comes true, and Dorian begins living a life of Hedonism. He falls in love with a lower-class actress, Sibyl and asks to marry her. However, after Sibyl performs badly on stage and claims to have discovered herself, Dorian leaves her. When he comes home and looks at the painting, he notices an evil tint in his smile. The next day he is told Sibyl has killed herself. He decides he will forget the past and live only in the present. After Lord Henry "poisons" Dorian with a book about a young Parisian who lived a life of pleasure, he becomes obsessed with pleasure, indulging in sensations, riches and interests.

Some years later, Dorian still looks youthful and is living a double life of crimes and pleasure. When Basil confronts Dorian about the rumors about his crimes, Dorian kills him. He blackmails the chemist Alan Campbell to destroy the body. Despite getting rid of all evidence linked to Basil's murder, Dorian can't escape from a guilty conscience and goes to the opium-dens to "forget." There, James Vane, Sibyl's brother, sees him and recognizes his nickname "Prince Charming," with which Sibyl called him. James follows Dorian to take revenge but is killed in a shooting accident. Dorian then decides to get rid of the painting that is allowing him to be corrupt. But when he stabs the painting, he ends up stabbing himself. The portrait and his body are discovered by his servants, who find the portrait in its original youthful beauty and Dorian wrinkled and withered to the point of unrecognizability.

From the beginning of the novel, we are introduced to contradicting ideologies, each represented by the characters. To Basil, Dorian Gray represents the return of the Greek ideal of beauty: “What ... the face of Antinous was to late Greek sculpture, and the face of Dorian Gray will someday be to me” (11). For Basil, realism is too vulgar and lacks imagination and romance. What Dorian Gray represents, then, is a marriage between surface and depth. Basil says: “Unconsciously he defines for me the lines of a fresh school, a school that is to have in it all the passion of the romantic spirit, all the perfection of the spirit that is Greek. The harmony of soul and body – how much that is! We in our madness, have separated the two, and have invented a realism that is vulgar, an ideality that is void” (11). The idea of separation of soul and body is one to keep in mind throughout the analysis, since the existence of the portrait represents the separation of the soul from the body, the portrait being the soul.

This is contrasted with Lord Henry’s scientific approach to Dorian. While Basil sees Dorian as a “new manner in art” (11), Lord Henry sees him as an experiment, “an interesting study” (42). Lord Henry’s approach to “art” is purely scientific and intellectual rather than aesthetic or romantic. “He had always been enthralled by the methods of natural science, but the ordinary subject-matter of that science had seemed to him trivial and of no import. And so he had begun vivisectioning himself, as he had ended by vivisectioning others” (42). He sees Dorian as an experiment and his influences are like injections of poison meant to produce some result: “The experimental method was the only method by which one could arrive at any scientific analysis of the passions; and certainly Dorian Gray was a subject made to his hand, and seemed to promise rich and fruitful results” (43).

The differences between a scientific approach and a moralistic approach to art are the two defining pillars of the whole novel: “In aestheticism the subjective view of beauty becomes the primary means of judging value: when considering whether a poem or a painting is good, aestheticism merely asks if it is beautiful or meaningful as a work of art. This forms a stark contrast to what was perceived to be an entrenched nineteenth-century habit of judging art and literature on the basis of the moral lessons it might teach to readers or viewers (its utility)” (Livesey 262). Basil presents a moral approach to life, whereas aestheticism disregards morality in order to attain pleasure in beauty – ethical dilemmas and immorality become part of artwork meant to be admired rather than lived through. With this book, Wilde is arguing that a complete aestheticism means the denial of the soul.

After the different approaches to art are discussed for us to know, Lord Henry presents Dorian with a choice: Basil’s romanticism and idealism or his aesthetic realism. Dorian is caught between the two modes of thinking: “let me think. Or, rather, let me try not to think” (16). To think or not is his dilemma: Is life meant to be interpreted or experienced? Virginia Brackett writes, “[Dorian] betrays Basil’s romance world into which he was born, rejecting the empowerment of artistic imagination to adopt Henry’s false promise of life through realism and science” (55). Wilde presents a criticism of the “modern ideal” of “the thoroughly well-informed man” calling it “a dreadful thing” (12). Brackett interprets this as Wilde’s warning against the exclusion of romanticism from literature. But this controversy is wider than the world of the literary. I see Wilde’s philosophy as a rebellion against the British colonial power, a criticism of the English realist and scientific approach, and a call to return to spirituality, romance, and cultural ideals. Dorian’s dilemma here is a metaphor for the Victorian debate

between romanticism and realism, but also the dilemma presented to Wilde and his conflicting identities.

In the scene where Lord Henry tempts and influences Dorian Gray, we can see foreshadowing and hints of the main themes and plotline that is to come in later parts of the novel. Here, Dorian is described as “pure” and Lord Henry “spoils” him by playing with his mind and tempting him. Lord Henry also represents the surface of high English society. If we pay attention to the descriptions, we see that the flowers hold significance and meaning relating to Dorian’s trajectory and serve to foreshadow it. In Victorian society, flowers were used as symbols and as forms of communication. The narration involving flowers serves to symbolize Dorian’s descent into corruption and decay, brought about by Lord Henry’s poisoning. “Lord Henry ... plucked a pink-petalled daisy from the grass, and examined it” (8). Daisies symbolized “innocence” (Greenaway 41). It is as if Lord Henry is studying Dorian after uprooting him from innocence, like a scientific subject – asking what would happen if the daisy was removed from its natural state of existence. Basil expresses his feelings towards Dorian as such: “I feel, Harry, that I have given away my whole soul to someone who treats it as if it were a flower to put in his coat, a bit of decoration to charm his vanity, an ornament for a summer day” (12). This foreshadows Dorian’s exchange with the painting, taking its “purity” and “innocence” and taking advantage of it.

During Lord Henry’s conversation with Dorian outside in the garden, a bee is described to “scramble all over” a lilac (19). The bee represents Lord Henry and the lilac, which also symbolizes “youthful innocence” (Greenaway 69), is being tampered with and destroyed by the bee. This happens immediately after Lord Henry says “Youth! Youth! There is absolutely nothing in the world but youth!” to which Dorian

listens to “open-eyed and wondering” (19). It is the moment Dorian has eaten from the forbidden fruit and his eyes are opened. He watches the bee tamper with the lilac with interest. Lord Henry says “beauty is a form of genius,” (18) it “has its divine right of sovereignty” (19). Lord Henry makes beauty seem god-like. He is the devil tempting Dorian, like the serpent tempting Eve. The original sin is the jealousy of God and the desire to be God, and in this case, beauty is seen as encapsulating all knowledge and intellect.

“Time is jealous of you, and wars with your lilies and roses,” Henry says, lilies and roses here symbolizing purity and beauty respectively (Greenaway 70; 97). Later on, flowers are brought up again as Lord Henry wonders about the fate of Dorian Gray: “The sky above was like a faded rose. He thought of his friend’s young fiery-colored life, and wondered how it was all going to end” (44). Again, the rose, symbolizing beauty, is shown as faded, in contrast to Dorian’s “fiery-colored life.” These themes of purity, beauty and corruption are central to the novel and to our study here. The romanticism of this purity is contrasted with an aesthetic realism that seeks to live only in the present, in seeing the reality of life as art. The foreshadowing of Dorian’s end is linked to his indulgence in Lord Henry’s philosophy of aestheticism which leads him towards debauchery, a life of pleasure at the expense of morality.

Even the approach towards Irishness is as if through scientific study, just like William Wilde taking Oscar Wilde along on *anthropological* expeditions in the West of Ireland. Wilde’s exposure to Irish culture came through *intellectual* discussions about the Irish and about Catholicism. Their view of the Irish is like a scientist studying their subject. The Irish are Orientalized and desired as the Other: “The Irish Protestant fascination with antiquarianism, folkloric studies and Irish ‘superstitions’ is, at least to

some extent, emblematic of an ethnographic encounter with a native population, and expressive of a means by which the Protestant Self can safely explore (and perhaps absorb) aspects of that forbidden culture” (Killeen, “Irish Gothic” 34). Wilde’s desire is the desire to be the Other. In the same way, Lord Henry approaches Dorian as if he is a scientific subject to be studied.

Wilde might be parodying the intellectual circle of his parents and their approach towards the Irish, but he is also aware of his own approach being that of an outsider. We can see this in Dorian Gray’s position as a spectator of life. In the Preface, Wilde writes: “It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors” (3). Dorian Gray takes on the role of a spectator, beginning as a literal spectator attending the theater to see Sibyl in a play, to a metaphorical spectator in life. “To become the spectator of one’s own life, as Harry says, is to escape the suffering of life” (78). By becoming a spectator of his own life, Dorian is repressing all the “vulgar” realities of life, denying History, and repressing the possibility of a revolution. By placing himself in the position of the spectator, Dorian is denying his reality. He views the vulgar as beautiful, romanticizing the realities of colonization, inequality and even death:

How different Sibyl was! She lived her finest tragedy. She was always a heroine. The last night she played ... she acted badly because she had known the reality of love. She when she knew its unreality, she died, as Juliet might have died. She passed again into the sphere of art ... her death has all the pathetic uselessness, of martyrdom, all its wasted beauty. (77)

His short-lived relationship with Sibyl was to him a play that he took part in as an actor then a spectator – a “tragedy” beginning with the unlikely love between a lower class woman and an upper class man ending in a tragic death by suicide. It is as if everything is a theatrical performance for him. It is as if morality isn’t real; “she was

less real than they are” (72). His relationship to reality is imagined, based on the ideology of Lord Henry that he is a subject of. This ideology acts as a strategy of containment, a mechanism by which Dorian justifies his actions.

Later, when Dorian shows Basil the changed portrait, he watches his reaction “with that strange expression that one sees on the face of those who are absorbed in the play when some great artist is acting ... there was simply the passion of the spectator with perhaps a flicker of triumph in his eyes” (108). Dorian observes Basil’s reaction as if he is watching a play, as if he himself had no part in this. This position allows Dorian to act without thought of consequences or moral dilemmas, separating the scene from the spectator, as a scientist would.

This is a criticism of the colonizer’s “scientific” approach to issues of colonization and imperialism. As Ellen Scheible writes, “the novel’s confrontations between art and artist; reality and art; and spectator and art each mirror the imperial confrontation between the classic positions of the colonizer and the colonized Other” (132). Dorian’s approach to life is that of the colonizer – the colonial ideology here being Lord Henry’s that Dorian is also a victim of. Lord Henry’s realist aestheticism allows Dorian to ignore reality all under the guise that he is looking at reality itself. In the Preface, Wilde writes, in a reference to Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, “The nineteenth-century dislike of Realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass. The nineteenth-century dislike of Romanticism is the rage of Caliban not seeing his own face in a glass” (3). Both extremes of Realism and Romanticism are unbearable as one shows a brutal reality and ugliness, and the other conceals the reality. With aestheticism, reality is romanticized in order to be bearable to look at, and ultimately, justified.



Read through this colonial connection to the debate between Realism and Romanticism, Dorian's double identity becomes for us the representation of a conflicted identity that is the result of the contradictions of the Victorian period. Dorian's adopted Aesthetic ideology seeks to view life *as* art, rather than seeing life *in* art. Although Romanticism is usually seen as a response against the beliefs of the Enlightenment, they do not have to be mutually exclusive. In fact, Aestheticism here shows us that there can be a pursuit of intellect through art, beauty and imagination. Wilde's book exists in the center of these supposed contradictions. What Wilde is showing is that we can't have a philosophy that is black and white, and that sees Realism and Romanticism opposed to each other. After all, one doesn't exist without the other.

This brings us to a state of ambivalence and movement between different schools of thought. These contradicting forms and movements are evident through Wilde's use of genre as "form itself is an important indicator of his ideological leanings. Wilde came from a family and a culture poised between folklore and literature, piety and profanity, periphery and center, Ireland and England, Catholicism and Protestantism, God and man" (Killeen 21-22) and his writing reflects these dichotomies. I read *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as an Anglo-Irish Gothic novel. It contains the defining traits of a Gothic novel, especially the themes of moral decay, the supernatural, the helpless woman, and romanticism. The Gothic has also been characterized by themes of "paranoia, Protestantism, anti-Catholicism, desire for the Other" (Killeen, "Irish Gothic" 35), which we saw rampant in *Melmoth the Wanderer*. During that earlier period, anti-Catholicism had become a defining feature of the Gothic imagination. What is interesting about Wilde's Gothic is his expression of a fascination with Catholicism and with Irishness, not in an explicitly anti-Catholic approach but

rather through an Irish Nationalist approach. Wilde uses the genre ironically, using Gothic elements to explore and question the contradictions and themes defining the Victorian period, like realism, romanticism, aestheticism, intellectualism, secularism, and more.

Wilde's influences are significant to look at, especially the influence of Walter Pater on his works. Killeen points out the following connection between Wilde and Pater:

Like Wilde's novel, which hesitates between two modes of thought, the scientific-realist and the Catholic-Gothic, Pater's book goes back to the Renaissance as a moment of liminality between the Catholic Middle Ages and the 'scientific' Enlightenment. Although many read Pater's intellectual commitments as driven by an almost atheistical modernism, his own flirtation with Catholicism demonstrates an ambivalence, a perpetual undecidability, which is brilliantly personified in his study of this historical period of transition. (*The Faiths* 87)

This juxtaposition translates well into our reading of the novel, viewing it at a crossroad between the supernatural, Gothic and Catholic, and the literal, rational and Protestant. "Wilde's view of excess in *Dorian Gray* imagines Paterian aesthetics as a system closely resembling the imperial project in its quest for a perfect expression of youth, beauty and pleasure. By association, Wilde suggests that British aestheticism will self-destruct, by way of its dependence on excess and exploitation for the sake of a form of pure or perfect beauty" (Scheible 137). Wilde uses the excesses of the Gothic genre to make a case against an extremist aestheticism. In doing so, he unconsciously shows a desire to conceal the parts of the "self" that are unsightly and must stay hidden – like a morally corrupt past.

Forgetfulness becomes a primary concern to Dorian, as he attempts to repress his sinfulness. Charles Bernheimer argues: “Decadent creativity does indeed open a space in which to ‘exist otherwise’: it does so by showing that every normative standard is already inhabited by otherness. Yet decadence cannot know itself as such except by forgetting the constructedness of the norm against which it measures its deviance” (54). Dorian’s forgetfulness is decadent forgetfulness, one that seeks to repress the conscience that makes his deviance evident.

The presence of oriental props in the novel is neither accidental nor insignificant. From the beginning of the novel, the scene is set with the description of the studio where Basil is painting. The garden and studio are a curated display of worldly treasures, with “Persian saddlebags” (5), “a Japanese table” (23), a “fluted Georgian urn” (23). These are described in contrast with “the dim roar of London” that “was like the bourdon note of a distant organ” (5). The studio masks the sounds of London and is filled with the odor and images of a curated atmosphere. The “stillness” it creates is described as “oppressive” (5) and Lord Henry is described smoking a “heavy opium-tainted cigarette” (6). From the beginning, there is indulgence in things from the East, things brought to them as a result of colonization and trade, brought to their little elite circle for them to take pleasure in.

Later in the novel, Dorian Gray uses the same pleasures as an escape from his sinfulness. He takes them as pleasures to his senses, denying the violence through which these things came to him in the first place: “For these treasures ... were to be to him means of forgetfulness, modes by which he could escape ... his portrait whose changing features showed him the real degradation of his life, and in front of it had draped the purple-and-gold pall as a curtain” (98). The curtain and its colors, purple and

gold signifying royalty and wealth, denote his pleasures in wealth and exotic treasures that hide the reality of his degradation.

He is using these foreign riches as a curtain, both literally and figuratively, that hides the truth about his corruption. He is romanticizing these objects, taking pleasure in them, in order to escape reality. At different points, Dorian finds new obsessions to take pleasure in. In order to experiment with the senses and see what “stirred one’s passions” (93), he studies “perfumes, and the secrets of their manufacture, distilling heavy-scented oils, and burning odorous gums from the East” (93). He surrounds himself with a fascination of the Oriental, “wondering what there was in frankincense that made one mystical” (93). He romanticizes and wonders with mystery at these objects, taking pleasure in them and using them to induce euphoria and forgetfulness – much like opium. He collects instruments, jewels, stories, tapestries, and more, all from different parts of the world. He indulges in these luxuries that were afforded him through his social class and access to *excess*, using the very indications of the corruption of his class as a means of concealing that corruption.

One of his obsessions at some point is Roman Catholic rituals and its aesthetics. “He had a special passion, also, for ecclesiastical vestments, as indeed he had for everything connected with the service of the church” (97). Significantly, he uses a pall to conceal the portrait. He sees religion as beautiful and fascinating, not in a spiritual sense but in an artistic sense: “the Roman [Catholic] ritual had always a great attraction for him ... but he never fell into the error of arresting his intellectual development by any formal acceptance of creed or system” (92-93). This fascination is similar to earlier Gothic texts’ obsession with the Catholic traditions, but seeing them as inferior to the “intellect” of Protestantism. Here, Dorian takes Catholicism as a subject of study, an

intellectual pursuit of its aesthetics, and not a spiritual journey such as towards  
absolution. His aim is escapism.

The most conspicuous example of concealment is, of course, the portrait that is  
the visible expression of all of Dorian's "sins" and History. "The portrait must be  
hidden away at all costs. He could not run such a risk of discovery again. It had been  
mad of him to have allowed the thing to remain, even for an hour, in a room to which  
any of his friends had access" (83). When Basil does see the portrait in its grotesque  
state, Dorian picks up a knife and stabs Basil. Previously, in the opening scenes, Basil  
had sought to destroy the painting himself when he saw what it had brought out in  
Dorian – an obsession with his own beauty. The irony of the subject killing his creator  
shows the consequence of Basil's moralism, that ironically led to a lack of morals,  
creating a monster. The monster Basil created grew more powerful than him and  
destroyed him. Dorian killing Basil signifies the murder of conscience and idealism by  
English society. It is a criticism of the view of life as beautiful and something to be  
indulged in while ignoring moral consequences. Wilde is presenting an image of  
decadence, where the obsession with surface beauty ends in disaster.

Basil's moral idealism is presented as a search for perfection and purity: "the  
decadent artist cannot quite free himself of the need to believe in a true world, even  
though he recognizes that it is a fictitious construction" (Bernheimer 58). Mimesis is the  
desire for the other's desire. Dorian's desire for Basil's desire is a desire for himself.  
But it is an image of himself based on Basil's idealism. It is subjective. Basil sees  
Dorian as "[pure]" but this purity is only defined through an ideology. It is impossible  
to return to this "purity" because it is a construction of Basil's mind, part of his  
imagined relationship to reality. Basil shows this desire to believe in idealism when he

asserts: “it is never too late” to pray for salvation (109). But “no; that was impossible” (86) – the answer had been answered. The painting, i.e. Dorian’s soul, can never return to its original beauty.

Following the act of murder, Dorian’s goal becomes concealing it, continuing to uphold an image of perfection to society and keeping the real image of his soul concealed. “He did not even glance at the murdered man. He felt that the secret of the whole thing was not to realize the situation” (111). The secret was to ignore anything bad that was caused by his actions, that he is an agent of “evil.” He then proceeds to hide all the evidence like Basil’s coat and bag. “He was determined that he would not think about what had happened until it became absolutely necessary that he should do so” (113). This reflects the privilege of the upper classes to not have to think about the violence they cause whether directly or indirectly. It is easy for Dorian to destroy the evidence by burning Basil’s belongings (126).

Dorian’s philosophy of forgetfulness and indulgence, repeated in the phrase ““to cure the soul by means of the senses, and the senses by means of the soul”” (128), takes him to the opium-dens to forget about the murder of Basil Hallward. “There were opium-dens, where one could buy oblivion, dens of horror where the memory of old sins could be destroyed by the madness of sins that were new” (128). This quote is loaded with meaning, especially considering the source of the opium he is using to forget. The opium-dens represent British Imperial trade and the racial and class violence of the Capitalist class.<sup>5</sup> Dorian is forgetting/denying his past sins, through the products of imperialism and colonialism. He represents the upper class buying forgetfulness and pleasure through the very things that are the result of their “sins.”

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<sup>5</sup> Also see Ya-Feng Wu’s “[C]allee me Oscar’: The Picture of Dorian Gray, Aestheticism, and Opium.”

The scene of the opium-dens also shows Dorian's philosophy in action. First of all, he goes there dressed "commonly," (127) performing as someone from the lower classes, putting on a costume as though he is part of a play. When he arrives, he observes his surroundings: "Ugliness was the one reality. the coarse brawl, the loathsome den ... were more vivid, in their intense actuality of impression, than all the gracious shapes of art. They were what he needed for forgetfulness. In three days he would be free" (129). He indulges in this reality as though he is living a fictional existence, ignoring the fact that these places represent the inequalities brought by capitalism, imperialism and colonialism. He sees the ugly as beautiful as though he is seeing a representation of ugliness as art, not as the reality of life.

This scene builds up to a significant moment in the novel: James Vane finds Dorian and, recognizing his name "Prince Charming," threatens to kill him. Dorian argues that he looks much too young to be the same man who "wrecked the life of Sibyl Vane" (132). We see his past following him everywhere, this time significantly at the opium den. Following this incident, Dorian becomes paranoid about James Vane following him: "Now and then a thrill of horror ran through him [Dorian] when he remembered that, pressed against the window of the conservatory, like a white handkerchief, he had seen the face of James Vane watching him" (138). But more than Dorian's paranoia, James Vane represents the inevitable traces of a past that cannot be concealed or erased. His past violence is following him into the present period no matter how much he tries to escape. That "handkerchief" is still present, haunting him, much like the "handkerchief" Melmoth leaves behind at the end of *Melmoth the Wanderer*, signifying the impossibility of the erasure of the past.

Although Dorian tries to escape his past actions, they seem to follow him everywhere he goes. Starting from the rumors, to James Vane literally following him, Dorian's secret alter-ego is leaking into the image of innocence he is trying to project. His crimes are described as "fearful phantoms" (139), i.e. ghosts coming out of the shadows to haunt him: "Out of the black cave of Time, terrible and swathed in scarlet, rose the image of his sin" (139). Throughout the course of the novel, it becomes increasingly more difficult to hide the truth. Running parallel to this trajectory is Dorian's increasing paranoia. Towards the end of the story, Dorian feels as though "life had suddenly become too hideous a burden for him to bear" (143), but this was not a sudden occurrence. Dorian has been avoiding and escaping his past from the very start of the novel.

Dorian tries to express his concerns and fears to Lord Henry when they are speculating about the whereabouts of Basil. Lord Henry's response to Dorian's concerns is to encourage him to continue to repress reality, by continuously interrupting the conversation to ask him to play pieces by Chopin. Lord Henry represents the dominant colonial ideology pervading their society. We are now aware that "local" English society and their ideology is very much linked to the global colonial imperial project of the British Empire. David Armitage writes: "The attributed character of the Second British Empire – as an empire founded on military conquest, racial subjection, economic exploitation and territorial expansion – rendered it incompatible with metropolitan norms of liberty, equality and the rule of law, and demanded that the Empire be exoticized and further differentiated from domestic history" (3). The things they use to satisfy their senses and take pleasure in are indications of wealth and a society built upon colonization. In the same way the opium-dens represent Dorian's



indulgence in imports to forget the very corruption of his societal position, so do the art and music that Lord Henry insists upon to convince Dorian to avoid making any change. This resistance to change and speculation is a mechanism used by Lord Henry to prevent the overthrowing of the dominant colonial ideology, an attempt to reproduce the ideology and allow it to prosper. They're using art and music to escape the "serious" topics like death and soul. "You and I are what we are, and will be what we will be" (151), Harry says to Dorian. Harry's temptations seem more evident here because he is desperately trying to distract Dorian from thinking too seriously about moral matters. He keeps telling him to keep playing music and to go to the club and to go riding with him – anything to stop him from thinking. Lord Henry's attempts represent the power of ideology to reproduce itself.

The main question in the last chapter of the novel is whether there is any possibility of returning to purity. Having already discussed the impossibility of this, we are aware that there really is no purity to return to because the individual is always-already subject. So, in a sense, Dorian is asking the wrong question when he says: "But was it all irretrievable?" (152). You can't retrieve what was never there to begin with. It is Lord Henry who defines purity as equivalent to youth and boyhood. The novel refutes its own claim: Dorian was able to commit all these crimes while simultaneously appearing youthful and innocent. Dorian was able to exist in this contradiction because in truth, we all exist in contradictions; it is the only way one can exist. "Before [his] birth" (Althusser 132), he was always-already subject and always-already a split subject. In Dorian's case, he was born out of the contradiction of his mother's romanticism and his father's realism. One half of him came from poverty and "vulgarity" (as Lord Henry describes it) and this is the half he has been repressing his

entire life by indulging in riches: “For curiosity’s sake he had tried the denial of the self” (153) – his self that is a Subject existing in contradictions.

The concept of an already-existence is persistent throughout the novel, an indication that Dorian was always-already corrupt. Basil tells Dorian, “I gave it to you before it existed” (23). The portrait was always-already meant to belong to Dorian. It was always-already his soul. Dorian is the subject of the painting, of that “new manner of art” that seeks to combine realism with romanticism. He is always-already a split subject. The separation between his soul and body through the portrait is a demonstration of this – he exists between two extremes. Dorian was also always-already part of the upper class by being born into it, but also existed in contradictions. His parents were from different social classes, his mother being from a wealthy family and his father “penniless” (26). He carries within himself an ambivalence already there from before his very existence.

When it comes to the question of a return to purity, an erasure of all sins, we are presented with an impossibility. Althusser argues that ideology exists already outside of History. The “purity” that is negotiated and sought and diminished was never there to begin with. Dorian dies at the end in his attempt to return to “purity” because there is no purity to return to. The curse of the portrait was already upon him before the painting, which represents Dorian’s “soul,” even came into existence. “No; that was impossible” (86): Dorian wonders if the painting will ever return to its original beauty and purity but realizes that’s not possible. The painting, a representation of Basil’s idealism, cannot return to a “purity” because that purity was in Basil’s imagination. He put himself into the painting – he put his ideology into the painting, projecting his view of Dorian onto the canvas rather than a reality.

No matter how much Dorian tries to escape and repress his actions, the traces of his sins remain, especially on the portrait. Dorian himself says, “the dead linger sometimes” (118) – they come back to haunt and remind him of his immorality. The “red dew” on the hands in his portrait (120) seem to him more horrible than the body of Basil himself. And even after the body has been destroyed, “there was a horrible smell of nitric acid in the room. But the thing that had been sitting at the table was gone” (121). While physically Basil’s body is destroyed, it still leaves a trace, through the smell of the chemicals, the blood on his hands, and his own conscience. Dorian’s attempts at forgetting the past and living in the present, or attempting to return to a purity are futile. The past cannot be gotten rid of.

In a final attempt to “deny his self,” Dorian decides to destroy the portrait that had allowed him to live a life of pleasure and sin. Basil represents idealism in that he holds the belief that return to purity is possible. Basil’s faith that salvation may be possible is a final hope of eradicating the past, but a hope that is soon proven to be false. Dorian is so consumed in his narcissistic ideology that even the motivation for salvation is selfish and rooted in his own self-preservation. His attempt at getting rid of the past ends up killing him. He can’t bear the doubleness he exists in, being alive in death: “It was the living death of his own soul that had troubled him” (152). His denial of one part of himself, the part below the surface, ends in his demise. He cannot exist outside of the contradiction between body and soul. All the things that Dorian’s portrait was concealing are now revealed on his physical body. There is no reversing the deformity. There is no salvation and no erasure of his past crimes.

At the end of his life, Oscar Wilde was baptized (for a second time) into the Catholic faith. In “De Profundis” he writes, “the mystical in art, the mystical in life, the

mystical in nature, this is what I am looking for” (1098). It is a search for a higher more symbolic meaning in life that is not afforded to him through realism. However, his desire to “be” Catholic, is an assertion of identity that comes at the expense of his other identities like a Protestant lineage and British influences and education. “Moreover, I am not at present an English man. I am an Irishman, which is by no means the same thing” (Wilde qtd in Killeen, *The Faiths* 74). The word “at present” implies he is acknowledging that there are parts of him that are concealed in an attempt at negotiating a ruptured self.

Killeen interprets that Wilde “desires to return, via Christ, to the foundational discourses of a folkloric, even primordial, religion, antecedent to all other modes of existence” (*The Faiths* 176). This is interesting because it implies Wilde is attempting to make a return to the “pure” – a view of Ireland and folk Catholicism based on a colonial perspective. David Pierce differentiates between two types of Irish nationalism: “one is the civic nationalism of the ruling group, the Protestant Ascendancy, and the other is the emerging ethnic nationalism associated with the Catholic dispossessed majority” (10). Wilde desires to be purely Irish Catholic but this idea of returning to a “past” is rooted in the English view of Ireland as primitive and stuck in the past. His subjection as always-already subject of a colonial ideology is evident through his rhetoric, ironic as it may be. His use of Protestant discourse and approach shows that his attempts at denial and revelation are always already dependent upon conflict and ambivalence of identity. Wilde spent his life fighting the contradictions that defined his reality, and his second baptism is his final attempt at “denying the self” while simultaneously being an attempt to *reveal* the Catholic self – the part of him that was closeted most of his life.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION: ORIGINS AND CONTINUITIES

There is a shift from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century with the Union in place, Maturin marking the “end” of the anti-Catholic Gothic tradition in 1820, to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Wilde, marking the beginning of the Irish Literary Revival in 1890. However, we have seen that these two periods are not necessarily disconnected, and that perhaps there are continuities waiting to be discovered. The 19<sup>th</sup> century began strong for British colonialism with the Union in place, but the Empire showed signs of decline towards the end of the century. It is significant to be looking at the same line of heritage and see two related writers, each taking on an opposing stance to the other. One is an anti-Catholic Anglican priest; the other, his great-nephew, a convert to Catholicism. The stepping stone, as we have seen, are Wilde’s parents, and especially his mother who clearly raised him with Irish culture and folk-Catholicism. The movements following the famine and Speranza’s involvement in Nationalist groups created a change in the expression of identity of the next in line in their family lineage.

Although there is a significant shift between the ideologies of the two authors, my analysis has revealed an underlying dominant ideology that is presented through a negotiation of contradicting identities in the texts. The imperial colonial ideology reproduces itself through unconscious expressions of the ambivalence in identity it creates. And indeed, these contradictions present themselves as part of the ideology which seeks to differentiate between groups of people in order to retain the superiority of one over the other. The authors are caught in the middle, identifying with both positions of the colonizer and the colonized. This ambivalence is revealed through their

presentations of ambivalent, conflicted characters that undergo constant negotiations of identity, making assertions of one and denying another, only for this cycle to be repeated until they make an escape or they self-destruct.

The study has shown that although the Gothic genre took a turn towards modernity, the earlier colonial ideologies and its associated anxieties have left their trace and are unconsciously reproduced, this time through a negotiation between tradition and modernity. What this shift shows is not necessarily a change in the ideology but in the way it is expressed as a result of the changing literary and historical contexts. Future work can take these questions into the future and look at how the Independence of Ireland and its consequent conflicts had their effect in the postcolonial literary sphere. Taking more Anglo-Irish Gothic works into account could also mean the possibility of formulating a theory of the continuity of ideology throughout history. This can also take into account the rise of Capitalism, its relationship to Empire and colonization, and the way it presents itself in the Gothic text.

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