

Deconstructing Moral Responsibility in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1913)

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Article Info	Abstract
<i>Article History:</i> Received 22 June 2026 Approved 03 July 2026 Published 31 July 2026 Keywords: deconstruction, différance, moral responsibility	In determining the moral responsibility of an action, one may need to consider the possible conditions behind the action. Intuitively, an agent is morally responsible for an outcome only if an agent caused that outcome. However, there are possible conditions that can reject this perspective. Oscar Wilde's <i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i> (1913) provides an illustration regarding the complex evaluation of moral responsibility. This paper used a descriptive qualitative method to explore and provide a deeper description of this phenomenon. Ethics perspective reveals that Dorian is morally responsible for his actions by the existence of dominant binaries such as free will, involve, and harm. However, a deconstructive reading shows that there are marginalized binaries that are visible in the novel which contradict with the dominant binaries, namely influence, uninvolved, and conscience. This exposes the instabilities of hierarchical binaries of free will/influence, involve /uninvolved, harm/conscience. Aligning with Derrida's conception of différance, rather than opposed to the initial evaluation, the instabilities between the hierarchical binaries shows that the moral responsibility of Dorian Gray is complex, unstable, and continuously developing, suggesting that deconstructive reading provides an effective method for exposing the limitation of fixed meaning in assessing moral responsibility.

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INTRODUCTION

In determining the moral responsibility of an action, one may need to consider the possible conditions behind the action. An intuitive based view claims that an agent is morally responsible for an outcome only if an agent caused that outcome (Sartorio, 2010). However, there are possible conditions that can reject this perspective regarding moral responsibility. It is possible in an event where an agent's free will is threatened while performing the harm which can cause a delay in determining the moral accountability of an agent. Monroe et al., (2014) emphasizes this by saying that free will that involves choice, alignment with

desire, and freedom from constraint can shape moral responsibility. In accordance with Monroe's perspective, an agent might bear less moral responsibility for an action if their free will is threatened, albeit projecting harm. Furthermore, there is also a possible event where an agent isn't directly involved in causing an outcome. Rather than being a direct cause, one can be a passive cause of an outcome which can result in a postponed moral evaluation. Engelmann & Waldmann (2022) emphasize this by saying that the longer causal chains lead to more lenient moral evaluations. This suggests that passive causation which is positioned longer in the causal chain can

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reduce moral responsibility, especially if compared to direct causation which is positioned shorter towards an outcome. Noticing the possible varieties of conditions regarding an action, an evaluation of moral responsibility needs a deeper analysis and consideration.

Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1913) provides an illustration regarding the complex evaluation of moral responsibility. The narrative itself revolves around the transformation of Dorian Gray who was once a naïve and innocent handsome young man that changes due to the influence of Lord Henry, an aristocrat with aesthetic philosophy. When his self-portrait magically bears his old age and infamy, he is now living with eternal youth, infinite passion, pleasure subtle and secret, wild joys, and wilder sins. Later, Dorian kills Basil, a painter who painted the self-portrait, and causes Sybil, Dorian's soon-to-be wife, to suicide, and blackmails Alan Campbell, a chemist. The self-portrait, as it changes into a horrible condition, reflects Dorian's moral corruption (Kulkarni et al., 2024). Other than that, the self-portrait also symbolizes the morality of Dorian Gray (Yang, 2018). However, Dorian is self-reflective and feels guilty and remorseful for doing those actions. Other than that, Dorian's actions are affected by the influence of Lord Henry, and the victims of Dorian Gray are also contributing to their own death. The availability of external influences, shared involvement, and conscience are the underlooked conditions that can inherently relate with the evaluation of moral responsibility of Dorian Gray.

This study employs Derrida's deconstruction, especially his conception of *différance*, to analyze the ambiguity of moral judgement in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1913). Derrida's deconstruction argues that meaning is never fixed or absolute but always formed through differences between concepts and continuously deferred. This concept is called *différance*, a terminology made by Derrida which means "to make a difference and to postpone" (Yegen & Abukan, 2014, p. 56). Olson (2011) supports this by saying that *différance* is a movement of spacing and temporalizing. In *Margins of Philosophy*,

Derrida defines *différance* as "the action of putting it off later" (Derrida, 1982, p. 8), indicating that absolute meaning is never fixed and continuously deferred. In this sense, in the lens of deconstruction, meanings are evolving and interconnected (Muafa & Anam, 2024). Derrida also states that "every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers ... to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences" (Derrida, 1982, p. 11), indicating that meaning comes within the relation to different concepts, not through isolated self-presence. Yegen and Abukan further explain the relation of binary opposition in the lens of deconstruction approach: everything exists with its opposition and due to its opposition (Yegen & Abukan, 2014). Through this concept, binary opposition such as free will/influence, harm/conscience, involve/uninvolve depend on and are shaped by other binary opposition. In this sense, Derrida's deconstruction challenges the hierarchical binaries by saying that each term depends on the other for its meaning, indicating that meaning is never centered. Evink develops this argument by saying that deconstruction emphasizes that reality is "an inevitably unstable construction" (Evink, 2020, p. 435) and that meaning is "necessarily contextual and finite" (Evink, 2020, p. 437). Sikka adds that deconstruction's purpose is to destabilize key assumptions of western philosophy and commonsense using "metaphor and contradiction" (Sikka, 2008, p. 233). Through this framework, the moral responsibility of Dorian Gray is shaped by the interplay of concept through contradiction, making it deferred and contextually dependent rather than fixed and absolute.

Several previous studies have examined Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* from different perspectives. KYRPYTA et al., 2024 conduct a study to examine Dorian Gray's self-portrait through the uncanny valley effect. This study indicates that the self-portrait transformation indicates Dorian's moral transgression. LIU Shichuan (2016) further argues that Dorian Gray embodies the animal factor whereas the self-portrait embodies the human factor. This study indicates that Dorian acts based on free will,

irrational will, and instinct without considering ethics which causes him to be judged as embodying the animal factor and the self-portrait is responsible for Dorian's sins and having the ability to control it which causes it to be judged as embodying the human factor. Urquhart (2015) further proposes an idea by saying that art, referring to the self-portrait and the yellow book, function as the devil as it tempts Dorian to act in transgressive and ultimately destructive ways. Furthermore, Duggan (2008) exposes Dorian Gray's moral corruption and destruction as a result from his pursuit towards aestheticism without moral consideration, suggesting anything that excess can cause destruction. While these studies frame Dorian Gray as a figure who pursues aestheticism without moral consideration, undergoing in moral transgression, acting based on instinct without ethical reasoning, and behaving in transgressive ways, recent study performs deconstruction reading to expose a marginalized aspect that is visible throughout the novel which can resist a direct and fixed moral judgment towards Dorian Gray. Using deconstruction approach, recent study provides a productive method for exposing the limitation of fixed meaning in assessing moral responsibility.

This study aims to analyze the hierarchical binary oppositions that construct Dorian Gray's moral responsibility through ethics perspective and to deconstruct these oppositions to reveal the complexity and ambiguity of Dorian's moral responsibility. This study thus argues that a fixed and final assessment of Dorian Gray's moral responsibility is postponed due to the existence of the marginalized binaries found in deconstructive reading.

METHODS

To uncover the hierarchical binary oppositions that construct Dorian Gray's moral responsibility and to deconstruct these oppositions in order to reveal the complexity and ambiguity underlying his moral responsibility, we utilized a descriptive qualitative method. Oranga & Matere (2023) argue that a qualitative method is a method

that explores and provides a deeper description of a phenomena from non-numeric data. Thus, it is suitable for this study, since it analyzed a phenomenon which requires results and findings in the form of descriptive text.

The primary data of this study was taken from Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1913) which consisted of words, phrases, sentences, dialog or narration that relates with the morality of Dorian Gray. Moreover, this study took secondary data from articles, books, and websites to strengthen the argument regarding the novel, the problem, and the theory discussed in this paper. In doing qualitative research one needs to undermine an oscillation between "getting in contact with something, finding sources, becoming deeply familiar with a topic, and then distilling and communicating some of its essential features" (Aspers & Corte, 2019, p. 151). In accordance with that, we conducted processes of collecting and distilling data. In collecting the data, we performed 4 steps, namely: reading, identifying, classifying, and inventorying. We read the novel and previous studies, identified the data that relates with this study, classified the data to certain groups, and inventoried using tables (appendix tables filled with data from the novel and the citation table filled with previous studies). In distilling, we analyzed the data that had been collected by choosing the data within the scope of morality and Derrida's deconstruction.

First, this study would analyze the moral responsibility of Dorian Gray through ethics perspective to find what is the philosophical construction of Dorian Gray's moral responsibility. Due to the existence of marginalized concepts, this study would utilize deconstructive reading to expose the limitation of the construction that has been shaped through philosophical analysis. To deconstruct the moral responsibility of Dorian Gray, this paper would use Jaques Derrida's deconstruction. Deconstruction approach is suitable to expose the limitation of Dorian's moral responsibility that is shaped through philosophical construction. This aligns with Evink (2020), who argues that the purpose of deconstruction is to disassemble philosophical

construction. Sikka (2008) argues that the method of deconstruction is as followed: “a reversal of the terms in the dichotomy, thereby subverting value-laden hierarchies, followed by a phase of displacement or transformation”. Therefore, the hierarchy of a binary would then be subverted, making it unstable. Then move to displace the binary entirely in order to subvert logocentric thought. This process emphasizes the ambiguity of meaning due to a play of binaries; therefore, it embodies *différance*: “They contain within themselves an ambiguity, a duplicity of meaning” (Edkins, 1999 as cited in Sikka, 2008, p. 234).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Dominant Reading of Moral Responsibility

Through an ethics perspective, especially those which are concerned with free will, involvement, and harm, our first finding indicates that Dorian is morally responsible for his actions. Dorian has been living chasing pleasure without moral consideration for eighteen years that cumulatively contributes to the hideous transformation of self-portrait, but the clearest and widely discussed in the novel are the cruel rejection of Sybil Vane, the murder of Basil Halward, and the blackmailing of Alan Campbell. These actions resulted into the death of Dorian relatives. For Sybil and Alan case from suicidal actions and a direct murder by Dorian own hand to Basil Halward. These actions would be examined in order to find Dorian’s moral responsibility.

Dorian Acts Based on Free Will

In the absence of external coercion, Dorian can be said to have carried out his actions based on free will, thus becoming morally responsible for his actions. There is no external coercion for Dorian to break his engagement with Sybil Vane, let alone to cruelly belittle her, but it is due to Dorian’s own fading desire towards Sybil Vane. Dorian claims this by saying “*You used to stir my imagination. Now you don’t even stir my curiosity.*” (p.98). Furthermore, the murder of Basil Halward is due to Dorian’s own anger and revenge for what Basil has done

towards him rather than a forced action. To run away from his responsibility, Dorian blackmails Alan Campbell to dispose of Basil Halward’s body. As the effect of Dorian actions is reflected in the self-portrait, Dorian expresses that his self-portrait “*is the face of my soul*” (p.174), emphasizing that his actions is moved by his inner soul rather than external coercion. In this sense, rather than acting based on external coercion Dorian is acted based on instinct, specifically regarding desire, revenge, and survival. LIU Shi-Chuan (2016), emphasizes this by saying that Dorian acted based on free will and irrational will, making him live based on instinct, the same as beast, without ethics and distinctions. Consequently, Dorian Gray did countless sins during more than ten years under the control of free will and irrational will.

Dorian Gray’s actions align with Monroe et al. (2014) describe as the psychological model of free will, in which free will involves the choice to act intentionally without constraint and the alignment between one’s desire and action. Dorian meets this criterion as he acts without constraint and because of his own desire. In Monroe’s experimental studies, he finds that people’s judgment of moral blame correlates with the choice capacity and intentionality of an action. In this sense, using Monroe et al. (2014) perspective on free will, Dorian is morally responsible for his actions.

Dorian Involves in His Others Demise

Dorian’s involvement over others’ demise is metaphorically shown by the self-portrait transformation and is considered morally culpable. KYRPYTA et al. (2024) further explains that the self-portrait transformation is due to Dorian’s moral degradation and it mirrors Dorian’s conscience and guilty soul. Sybil Vane decided to end her life, after Dorian cruelly rejects her, consequently Dorian notices a change that is “*touch of cruelty in the mouth*” (p.102) on the self-portrait. Dorian has murdered Basil and appears “*loathsome red dew that gleamed, wet and glistening, on one of the hands, as though the canvas had sweated blood*” (p.192). After Dorian performs these actions, the

self-portrait changes into something hideous, indicating Dorian's involvement over his relatives' demise, Dorian claims this by saying "*It is the face of my soul*" (p.174). After Dorian forced cooperation with Alan to dispose of Basil Halward's body, Alan decided to end his life.

Dorian Gray's involvement towards others' demise aligns with Sartorio's perspective. Sartorio (2010) argues about the relationship between causation with moral responsibility: an agent may bear moral responsibility for an outcome not by directly causing it, but by being responsible for something that causes it. This constantly relates with Dorian's actions. Dorian can be said to be responsible for the death of Basil Halward, as he directly killed Basil Halward. **For the case with Sybil Vane**, Dorian express his involvement by saying "*So I have murdered Sibyl Vane*" (p. 111), after hearing Sybil suicide news. While for Alan Campbell case, Dorian indirectly caused the death of him by blackmailing. With Sartorio's perspective, as Dorian causes death towards Basil, Sybil, and Alan, Dorian is morally culpable for his actions.

Dorian Culpability for Causing Harm.

Dorian can be seen as culpable for causing harm towards others. One night, when Sybil Vane acted poorly on stage, Dorian immediately decides to break the engagement with her and belittle her with harsh and devalued words. "*You are nothing to me now. You used to stir my imagination. Now you don't even stir my curiosity. You simply produce no effect.*" (p.98). When Basil confronts Dorian about his horrible rumor, a sudden anger bursts when Dorian looks at his self-portrait that visualizes his moral decay due to its worsening condition. As Basil is the painter of the self-portrait, Dorian kills Basil by stabbing him in the neck with a knife. Dorian's culpability for his actions is strengthened by his fear as Dorian says, "*They will hang me for what I have done.*" (p.188). As Dorian is afraid that his murder will be discovered, he blackmails Alan, a chemist, Dorian's former friend, to dispose of Basil's body. Shortly after the incident, Alan shot himself in his lab. In the end, once Dorian decided

to stab the self-portrait, the corruption of that had been displaced in the self-portrait, finally reflected in himself as he starts to possess a horror physical appearance: "*withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage*" (p.248). This visualizes Dorian's delayed culpability for his actions.

Dorian's rejection towards Sybil and threat towards Alan indicates emotional harm. Dorian's immediate decision to break the engagement without considering Sybil's reason, causing her to face an emotional meltdown. Similarly with Alan, Dorian's threat towards Alan, limiting his moral decision causes moral distress. Later, due to emotional guilt Alan ends his own life. Different from the Sybil and Alan case, the murder of Basil demonstrates direct physical harm to ending one's life.

In relation to Jeremy Bentham's consequentialist perspective that judge actions based on their tendency to maximize pleasure and minimize pain (Startup, 2024), Dorian can be said to be morally culpable. Sybil Vane faced an emotional pain and resulted into her suicide, Alan Campbell faces a psychological distress and resulting into suicide, and Basil faces a physical pain due to Dorian's Gray actions and resulting into death. Dorian's actions oppose Jeremy Bentham's perspective by maximizing pain and minimizing the pleasure of Dorian's relatives. This puts Dorian as morally culpable for his actions.

Destabilizing the Dominant Reading

Utilizing the deconstructive reading, our next discussion focuses on destabilizing the actions of Dorian which are considered as morally responsible. Initially, Dorian is considered morally responsible for his actions through the construction of dominant binaries such as free will, involve, and harm, but the framework of *différance* reveals that the dominant binaries are not stable but binaries that contain their own contradictions. These contradictions cause instabilities to the hierarchical binaries. Each term depends on its opposite, and in Dorian Gray's case, those opposites are not absent but visible throughout the text, causing a defer in

meaning. Due to the occurrence of binary instabilities, destabilizing can be done. The binary that will be destabilized are “own will vs influence”, “involve vs uninvolve”, and “harm vs conscience”.

The Collapse of Agency: Free Will/Influence

Deconstructive reading destabilizes the binary of “free will” and “influence” which can cause a collapse of Dorian Gray’s agency in relation to his relatives’ demise. In dominant reading, Dorian’s actions are dominantly performed by his free will, indicating that “free will” is more dominant in determining the moral accountability of Dorian. In this sense, Dorian is judged as morally culpable. However, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1913), “influence” exists throughout the story as a compound result of Dorian Gray’s actions.

The main influences that resulted in Dorian’s moral decay are the influence of Lord Henry and the self-portrait. Dorian himself claims this by saying that Lord Henry has “*tarnished himself*” and “*filled his mind with corruption*” (p.243). Supporting this, Hamad Essa (2025) mentions that Lord Henry’s corrupting influence is evident in Dorian’s transformation from an uncorrupted soul into a hedonistic and immoral individual. Tan (2022) further supports this by suggesting a term called Wottonian stage: a stage where Dorian is heavily influenced by Lord Henry Wotton. Dorian Gray, initially depicted by Lord Henry as a “rose-white boyhood” that signifies purity and naivety, becomes a man who devoted his life to pleasure and beauty. Lord Henry introduces Dorian to a philosophical approach called “New Hedonism”, a term that Lord Henry coined, which prioritizes the needs of pleasure and beauty above everything else. Hamad Essa (2025) supports this claim by saying that Lord Henry urges Dorian Gray to live out every feeling and dream to return to a Hellenic ideal. Furthermore, Lord Henry causes Dorian to glorify his youth and beauty, Lord Henry declares “*When your youth goes, your beauty will go with it, and then you will suddenly discover that there are no triumphs left for you*” (p.30). This results in Dorian’s

willingness to sell his soul to have permanent beauty and forever youth like the painting. Lord Henry also gives Dorian “the yellow book” and causes Dorian to see evil as “*a mode through which he could realize his conception of the beautiful*” (p. 163).

Another external influence that influences Dorian’s action is the self-portrait that Basil Halward created. Dorian claims this by saying that the self-portrait is the cause of “*All his failure*” (p. 244). Urquhart (2015) further explains the portrait has taken the role of the devil since it tempts Dorian to act in transgressive and ultimately destructive ways. At the same time, the portrait plays a dual role. On one hand, as Dorian witnesses the portrait turning horrible, he feels overwhelmed and guilty, as if he keeps being reminded of the effect of his actions. On the other hand, as it frees him from his old age and beauty deterioration, allowing him to pursue life without restraint.

The collapse of Dorian Gray’s agency towards his victim’s demise can cause a deferred and different meaning in determining the moral accountability of him that has been presented in dominant reading. Through a deconstruction lens, according to Evink (2020), reality is an inevitably unstable construction. Initially, Dorian is constructed for acting based on his own free will which causes him to be judged as morally responsible. On the contrary to the initial construction, Dorian’s action isn’t purely based on his own free will, but rather on external influences also. In this sense, the hierarchical binary where “free will” is more dominant than “influence” in determining moral accountability becomes destabilized. This causes a delay in constructing the initial meaning in which Dorian is morally responsible for his actions. This action relates with Derrida’s conception of *différance*, as Derrida explains as “the action of putting it off later” (Derrida, 1982, p. 8).

***The Complication of Contribution:
Involve/Uninvolve***

Deconstructive reading shows that there is an instability between “involve” and “uninvolve” binaries which raises a complication regarding Dorian’s contribution. In dominant reading, Dorian Gray is initially constructed as involved in the demise of his relatives, as his actions directly and indirectly lead to the deaths of them. Hence, he is considered morally accountable for his actions. However, there is an instability between “involve” and “uninvolve” because the supposedly victims contribute to their own destruction and indirectly harming Dorian. This causes complications regarding Dorian’s contributions towards his relatives’ demise.

Sybil Vane, for instance, invests her entire self towards Dorian, declaring that “Prince Charming rules life for us now” (p.70). This dependency eventually leads her towards death, since Dorian’s rejection becomes unbearable to her. Dorian, on the other hand, had a promise to reconcile with Sybil Vane again, but it is too late as she commits suicide. Her death, in turn, delayed Dorian’s pursuit towards goodness, “*It is not my fault that this terrible tragedy has prevented me from doing what was right*” (pp. 112 – 113) and becomes the turning point of Dorian to live chasing pleasure, “*Eternal youth, infinite passion, pleasures subtle and secret, wild joys and wilder sins he was to have all these things*” (p.118). Seeing in this lens, rather than framing Dorian fully accountable for Sybil’s death, Sybil can be seen as the one that has overly dependency towards Dorian and the agency to end her own life.

Similarly, Basil Halward’s creation of Dorian’s self-portrait, the thing that reflects Dorian’s corruption, becomes the catalyst of Dorian’s downfall. Basil’s adoration turns into the very thing that harms Dorian. He even mentioned that Basil is causing destruction more than Lord Henry’s influence. Dorian claims this by saying “*You don't know what he had made me suffer from*” (p.187). Seeing through this lens, Dorian is seen as the victim of the picture which causes him to live a corrupted life. Basil indirectly harms Dorian. Rather than seeing Basil murder as purely

immoral, Dorian’s action can stem from a deeper cause.

Meanwhile, Alan Campbell actions aren’t fully forced; he decides to comply with Dorian’s demand because of his fear of exposure, making him complicit into the aftermath of Basil’s death. In this sense, putting full accountability on Dorian seems to be unfair. Rather than reporting Dorian, Alan decides to seal his secret and comply with Dorian, in this sense Alan Campbell is also partly responsible for disposing of Basil Halward’s body. In relation with Alan’s suicide, Dorian expresses that “*his suicide had been his own act*” (p. 245), suggesting that Dorian isn’t fully involved in Alan’s demise as Alan is the one who decide to commit suicide. Furthermore, this puts Dorian into less accountable for Alan suicide.

The complication of Dorian’s contribution towards his relatives’ demise can cause a deferred meaning regarding his moral responsibility that has been presented in dominant reading. This aligns with a deconstructive reading, particularly Derrida’s concept of *différance*, in which to make a difference and to postpone meaning (Yegen & Abukan, 2014). Relating with *différance*, Dorian can’t be simply determined as accountable. Since Dorian’s supposed victim is also involved in their own demise and harming Dorian, the hierarchical binary opposition where “involve” is more dominant than “uninvolve” is destabilized. While Dorian appears to be involved in harming his relatives; Sybil, Basil, and Alan are not entirely uninvolved in their demise as their dependency, adoration, and fear also contributed to their own misfortune and indirectly shapes and harms Dorian. In this sense, Dorian’s culpability becomes ambiguous. Consequently, a fixed and immediate meaning in determining the moral accountability of Dorian Gray is deflected. This aligns with Derrida’s *différance*: “the action of putting it off later” (Derrida, 1982, p. 8)

The Duality of Dorian Gray: Harm / Conscience

Deconstructive reading shows that there is an instability between “harm” and “conscience”

binaries which emphasizes the duality of Dorian Gray. This opposes the fixed result of dominant reading where Dorian is seen as morally accountable for his actions because he projects harm towards his relatives. Despite causing harm towards his relatives, Dorian also possesses conscience. On one hand, he commits actions that cause harm towards others: he projects physical harm as he murders Basil Halward and causes emotional harm as he cruelly rejects Sybil, and blackmails Alan. On the other hand, he remains self-aware, capable of regrets, and emotionally responsive to the consequences of his actions. This coexistence between "harm" and "conscience" indicates the duality of Dorian's characteristics and can cause a difference and delay in determining the moral accountability of Dorian Gray actions presented in dominant reading.

Dorian possessed self-awareness as he would *"think of the ruin he had brought upon his soul, with a pity that was all the more poignant because it was purely selfish"* (p.145) by going to the tavern, changing his name and identity. The self-awareness of Dorian reveals that Dorian isn't entirely indifferent and that he is still morally conscious.

Other than being aware of the ruin of his actions, Dorian also possesses the capacity for regret. After noticing the unlikely coming back towards goodness, Dorian experiences emotional distress, acknowledging that it may be too late to atone for the destruction he has caused. While he cries, Dorian claims this by saying *"It is too late, Basil"* (p.175). Dorian's relationship with Sybil Vane further illustrates his regret. Dorian is regretful after he decides to reject Sybil Vane cruelly, he plans to reconcile with Sybil by making his first genuine love letter. Dorian's willingness to pursue goodness is also prominent in showing the regret he possesses. As he regretfully applies Lord Henry's destructive influence. He expresses a desire to be morally good by saying *"I want to be good. I can't bear the idea of my soul being hideous"* (p.109). At this stage, Dorian even distances himself from Lord Henry, suggesting an attempt to pursue a more ethical life.

Rather than fully acting corruptly, Dorian also possesses moral sensitivity. After killing Basil, Dorian continues to feel disturbed as he remembers the event, indicating a lingering guilt. Dorian's guilt of his murder is visibly shown when Alan notices tear in his eyes and a sense of "purity and refinement" (p.190) in his expression when Dorian asks for Alan help regarding the Basil case. Furthermore, Dorian feels pity for having to involve Alan in his crime. These moments highlight Dorian's moral sensitivity despite his corrupt actions.

Dorian's duality can cause a difference and be deferred in determining the moral accountability presented in dominant reading. The duality of Dorian Gray is shown by the coexistence between "harm" and "conscience" within Dorian Gray. Rather than opposed to each other, binaries of "harm" and "conscience" coexist within Dorian. Dorian possesses both "harm" (murder, manipulation, and cruelty) and "conscience" (feelings of guilt, regret, and awareness). The collapse of binary opposition is a result of deconstructive reading: once opposed to each other, the binary now exists with its opposition and due to its opposition (Yegen & Abukan, 2014). The collapse of binary results into a transformation phase (Sikka, 2008). In this case, Dorian's accountability is transformed. Since Dorian embodies both conscience and harming actions, Dorian resists being categorized as fully accountable for his actions. Rather than judged as morally responsible, the moral responsibility of Dorian Gray is deferred. The deferred of meaning relates with Derrida's conception of *différance*, as Derrida explains as "the action of putting it off later" (Derrida, 1982, p. 8).

Différance and the Deferred Moral Responsibility of Dorian Gray

Due to the existence of marginalized binaries, the moral responsibility of Dorian Gray over his actions cannot be fixed, because it is constructed through binary opposition whose terms are contextual, dependent, and contaminated thus making the moral responsibility

of Dorian deferred. This aligns with Derrida's conception of *différance* as he explains as "the action of putting it off later" (Derrida, 1982, p. 8). After presenting the destabilization, this part focuses on the deconstruction of the moral responsibility of Dorian Gray. Derrida's conception of *différance* creates an interplay between binaries that can cause the hierarchical binaries to be unstable. Having conducted both dominant reading and exposed its instabilities, it is now possible to perform a fully deconstructive reading regarding Dorian's moral responsibility.

The moral judgement "Dorian Gray is morally responsible for his actions" depends on a hierarchy: free will over influence, involved over uninvolved, and harm over conscience. This value laden hierarchy is constructed and can be deconstructed. When the marginalized terms are considered (influence, uninvolved, conscience), the judgment doesn't simply reverse: "Dorian isn't morally responsible for his actions" but rather becomes deferred. It cannot be settled as its meaning continues to develop as contexts shift. This aligns with Evink's argument that deconstruction shows meaning to be "necessarily contextual and finite" (Evink, 2020, p. 437). The moral responsibility of Dorian Gray isn't a meaning that exists due to a fixed value laden hierarchical binary; it is produced by the interpretive context in which it is evaluated. From the framework of ethics perspective, Dorian unambiguously bears moral responsibility. From within the framework of deconstruction, the moral responsibility of Dorian Gray is complex, unstable, and never finally determined.

Sikka's observation that deconstruction destabilizes the assumptions of western philosophy through "metaphor and contradiction" (Sikka, 2008, p. 233) is well-suited here. The dominant ethics perspective reading is a product of a western philosophy's purpose to seek fixed, universal principles for evaluating action. Deconstruction doesn't reject this perspective but reveals their incompleteness. Their dependency on marginalized terms, their sensitivity to context, and their inability to construct meaning of an

ambiguous figure like Dorian Gray. The moral responsibility of Dorian Gray is the implementation of Derrida's conception of *différance*: an "action of putting it off later" (Derrida, 1982, p. 8). It is shaped by the difference between concepts (harm/conscience, involve/uninvolve, own will/influence) thus it's meaning is postponed and continuously develops.

CONCLUSION

In evaluating the moral responsibility of an action, one needs to perform a deep and thorough analysis regarding an action. Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1913) provides a rich full illustration regarding the complexity of moral responsibility through the action of Dorian Gray. Through the lens of ethical perspective, Dorian Gray is seen as morally responsible for his actions. This meaning is constructed due to a dominant binary of free will, involvement, demise, and harm. Utilizing a deconstructive reading, these are not stable but binary that contain their own contradictions which causes hierarchical binaries, namely: free will vs influence, involve vs uninvolve, harm vs conscience, to become unstable. The instabilities of binaries don't result in a new opposing meaning regarding Dorian's moral responsibility but rather postponed its fixed and direct meaning. This aligns with Derrida's conception of *différance* as the moral responsibility of Dorian Gray is constructed through different concepts and contextual. In this sense, Dorian Gray's moral responsibility is complex, unstable, and continuously developing. Thus, rather than closing a discussion regarding the evaluation of Dorian Gray's moral responsibility, we acknowledge possible different conditions that can continuously develop the discussion regarding Dorian's moral responsibility.

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