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The Value of Youth in Dorian Gray and Stranger than Fiction

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a controversial work written more than a century ago. Astonishing his contemporaries, Oscar Wilde, the author, showcased several themes in the novel some of which are still relevant to date. For instance, both young and old cannot come to terms with the reality of aging, and this can be related to Dorian Gray, the novel’s protagonist. Conversely, *Stranger than Fiction* is a postmodern film whose protagonist Harold Crick lives a very boring “life full of solitude”. Karen Eiffel, the writer of the script, echoes the theme of time herein. Harold Crick craves to manage and save time but he never use this time to do any meaningful work. This essay will examine *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Stranger than Fiction* to compare and contrast the theme of youth and time. The two works expound on the value of youth in light of the time available to the protagonists and their use of it.

 *Stranger than Fiction* explores various issues that are dominant traits of the postmodern world. These include lifestyle, fate and free will, and the primary objectives of art. However, the most prevalent theme is that of time in the context of acceptance of the inevitability of death. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the protagonist fears death and wishes he could buy more time to be young. For instance, when he saw a painted portrait, he could not come to terms with the reality of getting old himself. Through Dorian’s words, the protagonist’s fear of death is evident. Though he knew that he would never stay as young as the portrait, he made a wish to remain the same and the portrait age (Wilde 20).

In *Stranger than Fiction*, Harold seems to illustrate a quest between order or calculation, and passion or freedom. He lives an isolated life that is defined by calculations and order through time management. This is seen at the beginning of the story when “the lanky young man under the covers reaches out from underneath his modest blanket and grabs his watch. He presses one of its buttons, stopping the beeping” (Whitcomb et al., 196). Harold’s watch, like the portrait of Dorian Gray, becomes a determinant of what Harold does and at what time. When the watch stops while he is at the bus stop, he asks for time from a stranger so as to reset it. The outcome, however, has consequences, as the writer says, “Little did he know this seemingly simple innocuous act would result in his imminent death” (Whitcomb et al., 197). The “imminent death” mentioned by the author signifies a major turning point in the story. Similarly, when Dorian Gray smashes the old wrinkled portrait, a significant change happens because he eventually kills himself. Though people had loved the portrait and the handsomeness of Dorian, it halted his life. This can be supported by the following words: “Behind every exquisite thing that existed, there was something tragic” (Wilde 30).

In both stories, fear of fate in relation to time is also prevalent. In *Stranger than Fiction,* this is exemplified by the following words: “Sometimes, when we lose ourselves in fear and despair, routine and constancy, hopelessness, and tragedy” (Whitcomb et al., 197). This shows that Harold was driven by the routines that were defined by his calculations while forgetting to live. These fears also seem to have grasped Dorian Gray. Wilde writes, “people are afraid of themselves” (Wilde 35). Ironically, he equates this form of fear with braveness when he later says that “but the bravest man amongst us is afraid of himself” (Wilde 35). This statement shows that most people fail to allocate time to be alone, and they always never know who they truly are.

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Stranger than Fiction* employ symbolism to develop their characters. Harold Crick’s watch represents a determinant of time, a symbol of personification, and a perfect guide in life. Similarly, the portrait of Dorian Gray represents Dorian’s image to stay young, his personification, and a divine guide in his life. The picture has traits of a living person, similar to the watch which can dictate the time for Harold. When Dorian smashes the picture, he dies instead and ends up having an old wrinkled face. When Harold’s watch stops, and he wants to correct it, he embarks on a journey of “imminent death” as the author suggests.

The *Stranger than Fiction* depicts a form of dullness and rigidity that define Harold’s life. He is portrayed as an existing person but the one who is not living. This is because he is so obsessed with calculations and timing that he forgets to enjoy his life. His advisor, a literary professor, tells him to continue living life while saying, “Just go make it the one you've always wanted” (Whitcomb et al., 197). As a result, Harold finally “did that which had terrified him before… Harold Crick lived his life” (Whitcomb et al., 198). Similarly, Dorian also went through several encounters in the past years of his life, blaming Lord Henry for the sins he had committed. He criticized the book that previously had a strong influence on him, taking a substantial amount of his time. However, Lord Henry responded to Dorian by saying that, “the books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world its shame” (Wilde 40). On the one hand, Harold consulted a Professor of Literature for advice, while on the other hand Dorian was influenced by a book.

In conclusion, the two works highlight the value of youth and its relation to the use of the available time. Overall, there is an overwhelming call for individuals to embrace the time that is available to them and live. It is also important to notice that the ideas mentioned are very crucial for all the people in the world. If the person does not understand the meaning of his leaving, there is no way for him to live a successful and happy life.

Works Cited

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