

**THE SETTING CONFIGURATION IN
'THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY' BY OSCAR WILDE¹**

*A CONFIGURAÇÃO DO ESPAÇO EM
'O RETRATO DE DORIAN GRAY' DE OSCAR WILDE*

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ABSTRACT

This article shows how the narrative chronotope characterizes other dimensions of the text and the way this relation influences the construction of meaning during the reading process. In literary narratives, the dimensions of space lay the foundations of the fictional world. By the construction of places in a certain time, the author creates a scenery in which his characters develop in the plot. Oscar Wilde's novel 'The Picture of Dorian Gray' is set in England in the late 19th century. This article concludes that the setting has an important role in the meaning-make process in which the reader engages while reading.

Keywords: fiction, narrative, plot.

RESUMO

Este artigo mostra como o cronotopo da narrativa caracteriza outras dimensões do texto e como essa relação influencia na construção de sentido durante o processo de leitura. Em narrativas literárias, as dimensões do espaço estabelecem a base para a criação do mundo ficcional. Enquanto os personagens se movimentam pelo espaço, ao mesmo tempo, ele ajuda a defini-los. O romance 'O Retrato de Dorian Gray', de Oscar Wilde, é ambientado na Inglaterra do final do século XIX. Esse artigo conclui que o espaço tem um papel importante no processo de produzir sentido no qual o leitor se engaja durante a leitura.

Palavras-chave: ficção, narrativa, enredo.

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INTRODUCTION

Oscar Wilde's novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, is circumscribed by the extravagant Victorian Era of 19th century London. The lifestyle of the Victorians was marked by days of leisure filled with English tea-lined afternoons, walks in the park, refined dinners, and nights moving through theater or opera houses. However, in this novel, the setting is not exclusively restricted to the areas typically attended by the Victorian upper class. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a vulgar, shocking and distasteful London is recreated in the mind of the reader. On this matter, the novel depicts episodes where dirty streets, alleyways full of rats, the seek for the opium (an immoral practice at the time that was traded and consumed by all social classes), deprived districts, etc. become alive as part of the setting.

Moreover, the London represented in Wilde's novel is an urban scenario visibly divided among classes. On one hand, a high society constituted by aristocrats, the bourgeois and nobles, stands on a tier above the lifestyle, morals, and values shared by another half, consisting of the masses - the hands and feet that underpinned the capitalist system. This is the same London in which Wilde's characters inhabit, the same setting that gives them life, defines some of their major features situating them in a socio-economic, cultural, historical and psychological context. On this matter, it becomes of great significance to observe how the spatial description is diluted in *The Picture of Dorian Gray's* narrative and how it comes to interfere in the reader's process of meaning-making.

The setting, in a literary text, should be regarded and with as much importance as other narrative devices in their contribution to the interpretation of the work, such as: characters, plot, point of view, themes, etc. Besides, the setting performs in ways that is able to elucidate certain aspects of the text considering, for example, the characters' dimensions. On the other hand, the setting can also be responsible for making other features not easily perceived or understood, even ambiguous, to the eyes of an inexperienced reader. In this perspective, the setting may play an essential role, as the reader can, for instance, experience in other works, such as *Wüthering Heights* (1847), by Emily Brontë, or *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), by Ray Bradbury. According to Dimas (1994): "[...] it is the reader's task to find out where the action of a narrative takes place, which ingredients of this setting, and what its possible function is in the development of the plot." (DIMAS, 1994, p. 6, my translation)⁴. In some works, the configuration of the setting is the most important element of the narrative, as observed by Lins (1976), such as in *Madame Bovary* (1857), by Gustave Flaubert. Another prominent feature of the setting is its symbolic dimension, for instance, with the sea in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1954) or Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* (1989). Therefore, the analysis of the setting is paramount in order to achieve a full understanding of a literary text.

In Lins's view (1976), the setting cannot be read without considering the time component, however, for the purpose of this analysis, one can artificially isolate it in order to study it. Lins's idea

⁴ "[...] cabe ao leitor descobrir onde se passa uma ação narrativa, quais os ingredientes desse espaço e qual sua eventual função no desenvolvimento do enredo" (DIMAS, 1994, p. 6).

can also be connected to Mikhail Bakhtin (2014), responsible for having coined the term *Cronotope*. The word is a composition of two Greek words: 1) *cronos* (time); 2) and *top* (place). In other words, it is a concept born within the literary scope, it is a form to deal with the space-time relationship in literary works. The same concept appears, as well, in Marília Amorim's text (2006): *Cronotopo e exotopia*. The image of the individual is constructed, within the literary text, through the *chronotope*. In this way, it determines the features of the characters and how they administrate their actions, and it also makes concrete the space described in the novel. In Bakhtin's words (2014): "[...] the fundamental interconnection of temporal relations and space, artistically assimilated in literature, we will call chronotope" (BAKHTIN, 2014, p. 221, my translation).⁵

Although, in this work, the setting may be thought separately from the dimension of time, its influence over other narrative devices will be taken into account. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, where the characters are situated in the spatial-time of the Victorian Era, it will be necessary to look at the setting configuration analytically. The importance of this study is complemented by the premise that the setting is an element of the narrative often forgotten by analysts, both nationally and internationally, and theorists regarding the systematization of this component. In that matter, the theme of this article dialogues with the representation of the setting in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The setting is a narrative device which, in an interrelated relationship, significantly contributes to the mimetic process in this novel. For instance, the description of the spatiality follows and reflects the decay of Dorian Gray until his tragic end. At first, a sunny and fragrant topography is represented appealing to the image of beautiful flowers. But, at other parts, the setting is characterized by steep alleys, dark corridors and an attic covered with cobwebs. All these spatial articulations have an important role and a complex relationship in relation to other dimensions of the narrative.

Topoanalysis is a term coined by the French theoretician Gaston Bachelard (2003) and it concerns the analysis of the setting in a narrative. At the beginning of Bachelard's thought, this study considered only the psychological dimension of the space (the places of the mind), nevertheless, it can also be applied to the external dimension of space. Moreover, the setting has many purposes within the literary work. Among them, it may characterize the characters in terms of situating them in a socio-economic, cultural, historical and psychological context; it may influence the characters in the performing of their actions; it may provide actions; it may situate the character, geographically; it may represent the feelings experienced by the characters; it may establish a contrast with the characters; and it may also anticipate certain events that will take form further in the plot.

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, after being disappointed by Sybil's performance on stage and breaking up with her, Dorian peregrinates the dark streets of London on his way back home. Along the way, the streets are depicted as decaying, with focus also on dirty and ugly people circulating among

⁵ "[...] "à interligação fundamental das relações temporais e espaciais, artisticamente assimiladas em literatura, chamaremos de cronotopo" (BAKHTIN, 2014, p. 211).

the crowd. It is as if the setting were an extension of Dorian's views, beliefs and emotions towards his disappointment in love. Dorian, who used to feel connected to all the beauty of the world, however, with his heart broken, or his honor, suddenly begins to see the London around him with other eyes, witnessing all its ugliness. In other words, it seems to be non-accidental the use of the particularities of this kind of setting right after the tragic event in Dorian's romantic life:

In a few moments he was out of the theatre. Where he went to he hardly knew. He remembered wandering through dimly-lit streets, past gaunt black-shadowed archways and evil-looking houses. Women with hoarse voices and harsh laughter had called after him. Drunkards had reeled by cursing, and chattering to themselves like monstrous apes. He had seen grotesque children huddled upon doorsteps, and heard shrieks and oaths from gloomy courts (WILDE, 2004, p. 100).

Also, when Dorian had entered his mansion just after his dramatic break up with Sybil, fragments that emphasize the details of the decoration appear in the description of the scene. These details of the setting help create a dense and obscure atmosphere of Dorian's home, preparing the reader for the scene when Dorian becomes aware of the pact he has made.

In the huge gilt Venetian lantern, spoil of some Doge's barge, that hung from the ceiling of the great oak-panelled hall of entrance, lights were still burning from three flickering jets: thin blue petals of flame they seemed, rimmed with white fire. He turned them out, and, having thrown his hat and cape on the table, passed through the library towards the door of his bedroom, a large octagonal chamber on the ground floor that, in his new-born feeling for luxury, he had just had decorated for himself, and hung with some curious Renaissance tapestries that had been discovered stored in a disused attic at Selby Royal. As he was turning the handle of the door, his eye fell upon the portrait Basil Hallward had painted of him (WILDE, 2004, p. 101).

Once more the luxury of Dorian's house is brought to the center through long descriptions of the setting configuration. These details help to create an idea of Dorian's personality as superfluous and only caring about appearances. In regard to extravagancy, Dorian himself comments that he is in a time when unnecessary things are the only needs of people:

There was a rather heavy bill, for a chased silver Louis-Quinze toilet-set, that he had not yet had the courage to send his guardians, who were extremely old-fashioned people and did not realize that we live in an age when unnecessary things are our only necessities (WILDE, 2004, p. 106).

Moreover, the character of Dorian Gray appears most of the time surrounded by luxury. These descriptions can be interpreted as a means of slowing down the narrative, but they can also serve to compose the representation of this character. According to Phelan (1989), one of the components that make up the character is called "thematic" and refers to the representation of the figure of the character within issues such as class, gender, society, etc. In relation to this aspect and the component

stated by Phelan (1989), it is possible to see in the use of these descriptions of Dorian's house a way to reinforce the image of the character as empty. Although surrounded by so many things, Dorian is a paradoxical figure, for he becomes increasingly empty in spirit:

One afternoon, a month later, Dorian Gray was reclining in a luxurious arm-chair, in the little library of Lord Henry's house in Mayfair. It was, in its way, a very charming room, with its high panelled wainscoting of olive-stained oak, its cream-coloured frieze and ceiling of raised plasterwork, and its brickdust felt carpet strewn with silk long-fringed Persian rugs. On a tiny satinwood table stood a statuette by Clodion, and beside it lay a copy of 'Les Cent Nouvelles', bound for Margaret of Valois by Clovis Eve, and powdered with the gilt daisies that Queen had selected for her device. Some large blue china jars and parrot-tulips were ranged on the mantelshelf, and through the small leaded panes of the window streamed the apricot-coloured light of a summer day in London (WILDE, 2004, p. 50).

The surroundings are so important for characterization that: "The delineation of space, processed with calculation, serves the purpose of supporting the figures and even of defining them socially in an indirect way [...]" (LINS, 1976, p. 70, my translation).⁶ On this matter, the character of Dorian and the figure of the objects in his house decoration are unconsciously juxtaposed by the reader, as if they were only one. The description of the opulence of Dorian's living room simultaneously helps to create the image of Dorian as a man of the upper high class, which are known to be called a dandy.

As soon as he was dressed, he went into the library and sat down to a light French breakfast, that had been laid out for him on a small round table close to the open window. It was an exquisite day. The warm air seemed laden with spices. A bee flew in, and buzzed round the blue-dragon bowl that, filled with sulphur-yellow roses, stood before him. He felt perfectly happy (WILDE, 2004, p. 106).

Moreover, according to Lins (1976), "[...] the setting, in the novel, has been - or can be understood - everything that, intentionally disposed, fits the character and that, invariably, both can be absorbed and added by the character, succeeding, even, being constituted by human figures, then restrained or with individuality tending to zero." (LINS, 1976, p. 72).⁷

The garden is another dimension of the setting that has some significance to the interpretation of other aspects of the narrative. For instance, when Basil tells Dorian that he does not recognize the old Dorian anymore (because of Lord Henry's influence over him), the protagonist's attention centers upon the garden. In that part, Dorian seems to admire the beauty of the flowers. This part suggests an association of the garden with the ideal of beauty desired by Dorian, life in all its splendor:

⁶ "O delineamento do espaço, processado com cálculo, cumpre a finalidade de apoiar as figuras e mesmo de as definir socialmente de maneira indireta [...]" (LINS, 1976, p. 70).

⁷ "[...] o espaço, no romance, tem sido - ou assim pode entender-se - tudo que, intencionalmente disposto, enquadra a personagem e que, invariado, tanto pode ser absorvido como acrescentado pela personagem, sucedendo, inclusive, ser constituído por figuras humanas, então coisificadas ou com a individualidade tendendo para zero" (LINS, 1976, p. 72).

Now I don't know what has come over you. You talk as if you had no heart, no pity in you. It is all Harry's influence. I see that.' The lad flushed up, and, going to the window, looked out for a few moments on the green, flickering, sun-lashed garden (WILDE, 2004, p. 122-123).

The image of nature is associated with the figure of the artist, the creator, from biblical references when it is said that God gave life to Adam and Eve from His Garden of Eden. Therefore, nature has for centuries become the source of inspiration for the creation of many works of art. It has always aroused intense sensations in artists, frequently it is the inspiration of great works. The garden that hides such beauty from biblical references can also be dangerous, since it was in the garden that Adam and Eve in biblical narratives were tempted by sin. It is in the garden that Doris and Henry have their first private conversation as well:

[...] How pleasant it was the garden! [...] and the two men went out into the garden together, and ensconced themselves on a long bamboo seat that stood in the shade of a tall laurel bush. The sunlight slipped over the polished leaves. In the grass, white daisies were tremulous (WILDE, 2004, p. 14-15).

Flowers appear from the beginning to the end of the narrative. In particular, the flowers of Basil's garden help further intensify the beauty and youth of Dorian so celebrated by Lord Henry: "Lord Henry went out to the garden, and found Dorian Gray burying his face in the great cool lilac-blossoms, feverishly drinking in their perfume as it had been wine" (WILDE, 2004, p. 23). As the garden, it is as if Dorian also inhabited the spring of his life at the height of his splendid beauty. The figure of the laburno plant, which is endowed with a yellowish pigment, is associated with the figure of Dorian. Perhaps this association is from the golden aspect of the flower that matches the gold of Dorian's hair. Still, this plant of such a beautiful appearance hides in its petals a terrible poison. Like the laburno, which many would judge as a harmless plant because of its beauty, so does Dorian, who always enchants everyone wherever he goes and because of his beautiful appearance, his actions are forgotten by people: "There was something about Dorian that charmed everybody. It was a pleasure, even to see him" (WILDE, 2004, p. 136). Lins (1994) states that: "It should be regarded in the study of the setting that its horizon, in the text, is almost never reduced to the denotative meaning" (LINS, 1994, p. 72).

Objects can also interfere in the way the reader sees actions performed by the characters. One example is the scene when Dorian notices the presence of his butler around him. He sees the butler through the reflection of a glass bowl. This glass metaphorically could represent the way people in Victorian England usually used to see people, only by their reflection (an impression). Therefore, from the reflection of his butler's image, Dorian has thought for a while he is trusted not to reveal about the portrait to anyone: "Dorian lit a cigarette, and walked over to the glass and glanced into it. I could see the reflection of Victor's face perfectly. It was like a placid mask of servility. There was nothing to be afraid of, there" (WILDE, 2004, p. 133).

Another part of Dorian's home seems to be connected to the representation of the unconsciousness of the character: the attic. The unconscious, term coined by Sigmund Freud, is associated to the part of the mind where people imprison unpleasant thoughts and traumatic memories based on their own bad experiences in life, in a way of repressing, forgetting momentarily. Unable to deal with his heavy conscience about the death of Sybil Vane, Dorian decides to repress his emotions and thoughts to the distant places of his mind. In Bachelard's view (2003), the image of a basement is associated with the idea of irrationality, obscurity, death, fear, mystery because it is a hidden part of the house. Following the same line of reasoning, it is possible to say the same about the attic, which is also a hidden part of the house. This idea is figuratively represented by the event in which Dorian moves the picture upstairs to the attic, hiding it from other people and specially from himself:

As the door closed, Dorian put the key in his pocket, and looked round the room. His eye fell on a large purple satin coverlet heavily embroidered with gold, a splendid piece of late seventeenth-century Venetian work that his grandfather had found in a convent near Bologna. Yes, that would serve to wrap the dreadful thing in. It had perhaps served often as a pall for the dead. Now it was to hide something that had a corruption of its own, worse than the corruption of death itself - something that would breed horrors and yet would never die (WILDE, 2004, p. 134).

Besides, the description of the picture of Dorian as heavy furniture could be, as well, associated with the weight of Dorian's consciousness in the face of his evil pact: "Something of a load to carry, sir. [...] I am afraid it is rather heavy, murmured Dorian, as he unlocked the door that opened into the room that was to keep for him the curious secret of his life and hide his soul from the eyes of men" (WILDE, 2004, p. 137).

The attic is depicted as an abandoned part of the house without being attended for years. This room would represent, as well, the true soul of Dorian, which he keeps metaphorically hidden and locked from the eyes of other people. In contrast with the exaggerated descriptions of Dorian's living room, the attic reveals all the emptiness of Dorian's inner soul:

The room looked as if it had not been lived in for years. A faded Flemish tapestry, a curtained picture, an old Italian cassone, and an almost empty bookcase - that was all that it seemed to contain, besides a chair and a table. As Dorian Gray was lighting a half-burned candle that was standing on the mantelshelf, he saw that the whole place was covered with dust, and that the carpet was in holes. A mouse ran scuffling behind the wainscoting. There was a damp odour of mildew (WILDE, 2004, p. 175).

The ordinary reader of novels in Victorian society was not very critical, in the sense that s/he did not reflect on the borders between fiction and reality or cared little for art itself. The book with which Lord Henry presents Dorian forms the triad with the picture of Dorian and the stage of theater for they demonstrate how art had great influence over the Victorians' lives, though it was also misinterpreted by

people. The Yellow Book's influence on Dorian reaffirms a society's inability to distinguish fiction from reality. Dorian seemed to use the Yellow Book as an instruction manual for his life:

The heavy odour of incense seemed to cling about its pages and to trouble the brain. The mere cadence of the sentences, the subtle monotony of their music, so full as it was of complex refrains and movements elaborately repeated, produced in the mind of the lad, as he passed from chapter to chapter, a form of reverie, a malady of dreaming, that made him unconscious of the falling day and creeping shadows (WILDE, 2004, p. 142).

The way Dorian uses his book, with many copies of several colors, draws attention, as well, to his futility. In France, a tradition of wrapping novels using yellow paper used to be a way of alerting readers to its lascivious content. On this matter, the color of the book has a symbolic dimension.

He procured from Paris no less than nine large-paper copies of the first edition, and had them bound in different colours, so that they might suit his various moods and the changing fancies of a nature over which he seemed, at times, to have almost entirely lost control (WILDE, 2004, p. 143).

Dorian Gray becomes fascinated by the figure of Sybil. It is through the theatrical setting that Dorian's passion is built upon the illusion that Sybil is a multi-faced woman:

One evening she is Rosalind, and the next evening she is Imogen. I have seen her die in the gloom of an Italian tomb, sucking the poison from her lover's lips. I have watched her wandering through the forest of Arden, disguised as a pretty boy in hose and doublet and dainty cap. She has been mad, and has come into the presence of a guilty king, and given him rue to wear, and bitter herbs to taste of. She has been innocent, and the black hands of jealousy have crushed her reed-like throat. I have seen her in every age and in every costume (WILDE, 2004, p. 57).

Thus, it is the scene of the plays that helps characterize the image of Sybil as that of a multi-faceted woman for Dorian. Nevertheless, he soon finds out that she is just a common woman of society. The theater may also be regarded as the symbolic representation that can be associated to the perfect illusion that art creates. In Dorian's view, art and reality seem to blend more and more throughout the narrative. The character seems to fall in love only with Sybil, who is on the central stage, not the backstage woman, who is as ordinary as the others. This demonstrates how superficial Dorian's feelings are toward the people he claims to love. "She is all the great heroines of the world in one" (WILDE, 2004, p. 61).

In chapter XVI, the setting contributes to the formation of a dense and mysterious atmosphere. It portrays a border of London corrupted by the pursuit of pleasures, specially by people addicted to opium:

A cold rain began to fall, and the blurred street-lamps looked ghastly in the dripping mist. The public-houses were just closing, and dim men and women were clustering in broken groups round their doors. From some of the bars came the sound of horrible laughter. In others, drunkards brawled and screamed [...] Lying back in the hansom, with his hat pulled over his

forehead, Dorian Gray watched with listless eyes the sordid shame of the great city [...] 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 (WILDE, 2004, p. 177).

The spatial conventionalism that once valued the countryside as the central setting in the novel provided its room to the urban centers, as Dimas (1994) points out: “The discredit [...] would only occur in the second half of the nineteenth century, with the advent of Realism, whose preferential setting is the city, regarded as the diffuser center of moral perversion”. (DIMAS, 1994, p. 39, my translation).⁸ In this mostly urban setting that the plot of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* develops. The urban spaces in the Victorian era were places often seized by dirt around houses and churches, with a blackened landscape of chimney soot, polluted both aesthetically and by the roar of cabbies and crowds that circulated in the streets (ALTICK, 1973). In the first chapters of the novel, only London spaces frequented by the upper class appear in the descriptions. However, it becomes apparent that from the pact that Dorian makes, gradually, humid places, old and steep locations also become part of the spatial configuration. Altick (1973) says that:

There was grim appropriateness in the fact that Gustave Doré, having done a set of illustrations for the Divine Comedy, should have gone on to portray the Mid-Victorian London in terms powerfully suggestive of purgatory and Hell (ALTICK, 1973, p. 77-78).

In chapter IV, it is the first time that a description of the streets of London is shown differently from that image of refinement. In Altick’s eyes (1973, p. 77), “The city’s density and expanse bred the sense of captivity, of helplessness, of claustrophobia. Its ugliness finally obscured its grandeur; the wretchedness of most of its inhabitants mocked the luxury of the few”. The sight of the streets as labyrinths appears when Dorian decides to tell Lord Henry about his engagement to Sybil Vane:

I remembered what you had said to me on that wonderful evening when we first dined together, about the search for beauty being the real secret of life. I don’t know what I expected, but I went out and wandered eastward, soon losing my way in a labyrinth of grimy streets and black, grassless squares. About half-past eight I passed by an absurd little theatre, with great flaring gas-jets and gaudy play-bills (WILDE, 2004, p. 54-55).

The decadent setting of this part of the city is the same that characterizes the figure of the Jewish character who owns the theater where Sybil worked as monstrous: “He had greasy ringlets, and an enormous diamond blazed in the center of a soiled shirt. [...] He was such a monster” (WILDE, 2004, p. 55). Dorian sits down in the theater and criticizes the decadent, old, grimy, gaudy appearance of the place:

Well, I found myself seated in a horrid little private box, with a vulgar drop-scene staring me in the face. I looked out from behind the curtain, and surveyed the house. It was a tawdry

⁸ “O descrédito [...] só viria a ocorrer já na segunda metade do séc. 19, com o advento do Realismo, cujo espaço preferencial é a cidade, encarada como centro difusor de perversão moral” (DIMAS, 1994, p. 39).

affair, all Cupids and cornucopias, like a third-rate wedding-cake. The gallery and pit were fairly full, but the two rows of dingy stalls were quite empty, and there was hardly a person in what I suppose they called the dress-circle. Women went about with oranges and ginger-beer, and there was a terrible consumption of nuts going on (WILDE, 2004, p. 56).

Besides, Dorian reported to Lord Henry to have been bothered when he watched Romeo and Juliet as “[...] a wretched hole of a place” (WILDE, 2004, p. 56). The character even compared the grotesque feature of the actors to the very scene of the play in which “They were both grotesque as the scenery, and that looked as if it had come from a country-booth” (WILDE, 2004, p. 56).

In spite of the elements that comprise the setting, some of these elements are decorative materials and if taken out of the text they would not influence the plot. However, this analysis aims at highlighting those that surpass the mere decorative dimension and reach the symbolic. In this case, Dorian Gray’s picture is an element of the setting that is essential to the narrative context, since it acts almost as a driving force at the beginning of the work by contrasting the immortality of a beautiful and jovial idealization by the artist, Basil, to the limited existence of Dorian’s human life. It is through the portrait that the Faustian pact is sealed, and then the object bears the soul of Dorian, disconnected from his flesh. The picture of Dorian was the physical manifestation of his conscience because of all the sins he had committed, for: “There was only one bit of evidence left against him. The picture itself - that was evidence. I would destroy it” (WILDE, 2004, p. 253).

The setting that at first was all spring, at the end gives rise to descriptions of an increasingly lifeless nature. Dorian came to the winter of his life: “The dead leaves that were blown against the leaded breads seemed to him his own wasted resolutions and wild regrets” (WILDE, 2004, p. 222). When Dorian goes to watch Sir Geoffrey Clouston’s hunt, there is more of this dead nature: “made his way to his guest through the withered bracken and rough undergrowth” (WILDE, 2004, p. 229).

Other important figures in the setting are the animals. The presence of them guarantee a more metaphorical reading of the characters. In a passage in which Dorian talks with Lord Henry, we could associate the image of a parrot in a cage with that of Dorian Gray, who, like the bird, was appreciated only for its beauty. When Lord Henry points to the bird and he moves back and forth as if performing a dance, we can see the very relationship between Lord Henry and Dorian. Dorian, in several other passages is said to be troubled by the judgments of Lord Henry. Dorian resembles to Lord Henry the representation of an animal, trapped in a cage and being glimpsed and admired from afar. The colors of the bird resemble Dorian as well:

Lord Henry strolled across the room and began to stroke the head of a curious Java parrot, a large greyplumaged bird, with pink crest and tail, that was balancing itself upon a bamboo perch. As his pointed fingers touched it, it dropped the white scurf of crinkled lids over black glass-like eyes, and began to sway backwards and forwards (WILDE, 2004, p. 243).

Another animal that seems to contrast with the figure of Dorian is the hare. Dorian says that the hare is a very lovely creature: “It looked the loveliest of little live things.” It is curious to see Dorian take pity on the animal. Perhaps, the animal’s innocent features reminded himself of the time before he had surrendered his soul. And the avid hunters chasing the hare could stand for the representation of society itself.

Suddenly from a lumpy tussock of old grass, some twenty yards in front of them, with black-tipped ears erect, and long hinder limbs throwing it forward, started a hare. It bolted for a thicket of alders. Sir Geoffrey put his gun to his shoulder, but there was something in the animal’s grace of movement that strangely charmed Dorian Gray, and he cried out at once, ‘Don’t shoot it, Geoffrey. Let it live’ (WILDE, 2004, p. 229).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Taking into account the theme of this article - an analysis about the characterization of the setting in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* -, it was the central purpose to focus on how this literary device helps in the construction of meaning in the process of reading. On this matter, Oscar Wilde’s novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is set in England in the late 19th century. This study was relevant because the setting is an element of the narrative often forgotten by analysts and theorists. In this analysis, it becomes evident that the setting has many functions within the literary work: it influences the characters in the performing of their actions; it provides actions; it situates the characters geographically; it represents the feelings experienced by the characters; it establishes a contrast with the characters; and it also anticipates certain events that will take form further in the plot. The theoretical support for the analysis came from a number of sources, such as Bakhtin (2014), Bachelard (2003), Dimas (1994) and Lins (1976).

To conclude, the setting in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* matters as much as other narrative devices that are part of its structure. And this analysis of the setting was important in order to achieve the elucidation of certain aspects that might often be overlooked in the text. Thus, this article concludes that for the reader of this novel to have a productive reading, that is, when s/he manages to engage in the process of co-creation of the narrative through her/his reading, s/he needs to use her/his horizon of expectations and her/his encyclopedic knowledge to make sense of the fictional environment. Besides that, this article shows that the setting is a narrative device which, in an interrelated relationship, significantly contributes to the mimetic process.

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