SYDNEY THEATRE CO EDUCATION

ON CUE

The Picture of Dorian Gray

TABLE OF CONTENTS

About *On Cue* and STC	3
Curriculum Connections	4
Cast and Creatives	5
Director's Note	6
Synopsis	8
Character Analysis	9
Pre-Teaching *The Picture of Dorian Gray*	11
Themes and Ideas	12
Form, Style and Convention	20
Bibliography	22

Compiled by Kelly Young

The activities and resources contained in this document are designed for educators as the starting point for developing more comprehensive lessons for this production. Kelly Young is the Education Manager for Sydney Theatre Company. You can contact Kelly on **kyoung@sydneytheatre.com.au**

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ABOUT *ON CUE* & STC

ABOUT *ON CUE*

STC Ed has a suite of resources located on our website to enrich and strengthen teaching and learning surrounding the plays in the STC season.

Each school show will be accompanied by an *On Cue* e-publication which will feature essential information for teachers and students, such as curriculum links, information about the playwright, synopsis, character analysis, thematic analysis and suggested learning experiences.

For more in-depth digital resources surrounding productions, please visit the STC Ed page on our website: **sydneytheatre.com.au/education**

Such resources include:

- Director documentaries
- Design sketchbooks

STC acknowledges the Gadigal people of the Eora nation who are the traditional custodians of the land on which the Company gathers. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and we extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with whom we work and with whom we share stories.

ABOUT SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

In 1980, STC's first Artistic Director Richard Wherrett defined STC's mission as to provide "first class theatrical entertainment for the people of Sydney – theatre that is grand, vulgar, intelligent, challenging and fun."

Almost 40 years later, that ethos still rings true.

STC offers a diverse program of distinctive theatre of vision and scale at its harbourside home venue, The Wharf; Roslyn Packer Theatre at Walsh Bay; and Sydney Opera House, as a resident theatre company.

STC has a proud heritage as a creative hub and incubator for Australian theatre and theatre-makers, developing and producing eclectic Australian works, interpretations of classic repertoire and great international writing. STC strives to create theatre experiences that reflect Sydney's distinctive personality and engage audiences.

Strongly committed to engagement in the community, STC's Education and Communities programs aim to inspire theatre appreciation and participation not only in theatres but also in schools, community halls; wherever people get together. STC offers an innovative School Drama™ program; partners with groups in metropolitan Sydney, regional centres and rural areas; and reaches beyond NSW with touring productions throughout Australia. Through these partnerships and initiatives, STC plays a part in ensuring a creative, forward-thinking and sociable future by engaging with young people, students and teachers.

The theatre careers of many of Australia's internationally renowned artists have been launched and fostered at STC, including Mel Gibson, Judy Davis, Hugo Weaving, Toni Collette, Rose Byrne, Benedict Andrews and Cate Blanchett.

STC often collaborates with international artists and companies and, in recent years, the Company's international profile has grown significantly with productions touring extensively to great acclaim.

STC is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, by its arts funding and advisory body, and by the New South Wales Government through Arts NSW.

sydneytheatre.com.au

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

The Picture of Dorian Gray. Eryn Jean Norvill.
Photo: Daniel Boud

SUITABLE FOR

Students in Years 10–12

CURRICULUM LINKS

Drama Stages 5 & 6

- Individual Project: Monologue
- Dramatic Forms and Performance Styles: Scripted Drama
- Improvisation, Playbuilding and Acting
- Elements of Production in Performance
- Multidisciplinary Theatre

English Stages 5 & 6

- Suggested text in Fiction, Film and other texts
- English Extension 1 Module: Texts, Culture and Value
- English Stage 6: Elective 2 Worlds of Upheaval; Elective 4 Literary Mindscapes

THEMES AND IDEAS

- Societal Constructions of Power
- Influence of Art, Music and Theatre
- The Construction of Identity.

CAST & CREATIVES

The Picture of Dorian Gray

BY OSCAR WILDE
ADAPTED AND DIRECTED BY KIP WILLIAMS

PERFORMER
ERYN JEAN NORVILL

ALTERNATE PERFORMER
NIKKI SHIELS

ADAPTOR AND DIRECTOR
KIP WILLIAMS
DESIGNER
MARG HORWELL
LIGHTING DESIGNER
NICK SCHLIEPER
COMPOSER AND SOUND DESIGNER
CLEMENCE WILLIAMS
VIDEO DESIGNER
DAVID BERGMAN
DRAMATURG AND CREATIVE ASSOCIATE
ERYN JEAN NORVILL
PRODUCTION DRAMATURG
PAIGE RATTRAY
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
IAN MICHAEL

ORIGINAL VOICE AND TEXT COACH
DANIELLE ROFFE
ADDITIONAL VOICE AND TEXT COACH
LEITH MCPHERSON

PRODUCTION MANAGER
KIRBY BRIERTY
STAGE MANAGER
JAYMI KNIERUM
REHEARSAL STAGE MANAGER
SARAH SMITH
DEPUTY STAGE MANAGER
LIAM BARWICK
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER
NICOLA STAVAR
COSTUME COORDINATOR
SAM PERKINS
BACKSTAGE WARDROBE SUPERVISOR
SIMONE EDWARDS

HAIR, WIG & MAKEUP SUPERVISOR
LAUREN A. PROIETTI
LIGHTING SUPERVISOR
ANDREW TOMPKINS
LIGHTING REALISER
CHRIS TWYMAN
HEAD LIGHTING TECHNICIAN
AMY ROBERTSON
LIGHTING OPERATOR
ANDREW WILLIAMS
SOUND SUPERVISOR
HAYLEY FORWARD
SOUND OPERATOR
ANNIKA UNSEN
SOUND TECHNICIAN
KHYAM COX
VIDEO SUPERVISOR
MICHAEL HEDGES
VIDEO SWITCHER
BEN ANDREWS

FOCUS PULLER AND CAMERA OPERATOR
JOSH VELLIS
CAMERA OPERATOR
ZOLTAN JONAS
CAMERA OPERATOR
SAM STEINLE
CAMERA OPERATOR
BABI BERTOLDI
STAGING SUPERVISOR, HEAD STAGING TECHNICIAN
DAVID TONGS
FLY SUPERVISOR
ZACH WHITE
AUTOMATION OPERATOR
LIAM KENNEDY
STAGING TECHNICIAN
ASH LYONS
STAGING TECHNICIAN
SCOTT MARCUS
REHEARSAL AND PRODUCTION PHOTOGRAPHER
DANIEL BOUD

2 HOURS, NO INTERVAL

THIS ADAPTATION OF *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY* PREMIERED AT ROSLYN PACKER THEATRE ON 28 NOVEMBER 2020

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION SUPPORTED BY FRANCES ALLAN & IAN NAREV, AND MEGAN GRACE & BRIGHTON GRACE.

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DIRECTOR'S NOTE: KIP WILLIAMS

One of the things I find most remarkable about Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is the way in which it imagines a physical form for the dialogue of one's interior. That physical form is, of course, the magical portrait Basil Hallward paints of Dorian Gray. It is Dorian's relationship to this ever-evolving picture that forms Wilde's metaphor for the relationship each of us experiences in virtually every moment of our lives, the relationship with one's self. Just as Dorian possesses in his painting a witness to his spiraling behaviour, so too do we possess within each of us an omniscient and omnipresent observer that records our every action. Some might call this the "ego", others our "conscience" or "soul". However you name it, Wilde posits that this witness is ultimately inescapable, and I would agree with him.

Pivotal to Wilde's story is Dorian's unchanging youth and beauty. In essence, Dorian can behave however he likes and his actions will be free of any immediate, personal consequence, other than that which is recorded on the hidden portrait, known only in full by the forever blemish-less Dorian. And herein lies the provocation at the heart of *Dorian Gray*, regarding the moral responsibility of the individual: how do we choose to live if we are removed from the consequences of our actions? It's a thoroughly modern question.

Indeed, Wilde's novel is also modern for the way it examines the pursuit of individual pleasure. This idea is most explicitly expressed in Lord Henry's solipsistic belief that every individual must, at all costs, pursue a life of self discovery, sensory expression and beauty, before time robs them of the youth in which to relish it. The collision of Henry's paradigm and Dorian's ability to escape consequence is one that speaks, almost prophetically, to the moral crises of the twenty-first century. As Dorian navigates the question of how to live, a contradiction emerges: pleasure acts as both a marker of self-actualisation and a harbinger of self-destruction. On one hand, Wilde paints, with seductive compulsion, the importance of the liberation of the individual from the bonds of conservative stricture in order that they might realise a form of authenticity, an expression of true desire and, in turn, a manifestation of pure gratification. On the other hand, Wilde is quick to foreshadow the dangers of excess and the damages of ego and narcissism. These are paradoxical outcomes, the simultaneous liberation and destruction of self, and Wilde is deliberate in laying out the argument for both. After all, paradox is central to the Wildean worldview.

Wilde's work is often profoundly concerned with the way people perform in life. While the portrait reflects the truth of Dorian's being (or his soul), like us, Dorian is free to evolve a persona (or personae) to suit his agenda and circumstance, in turn masking that which is beneath. Gender, class, and sexuality play key roles in Wilde's thinking here, as they do in this production. Indeed, Wilde himself was acutely aware of the ways in which a life might be viewed as a grand act of theatre, filled with not one, but many characters that one performs. Wilde was forthcoming in the way he saw the three central characters of *Dorian Gray* as expressions of three parts of his own personae: Dorian, who he sought to be, Lord Henry, who people perhaps saw him as being publicly, and Basil Hallward, who he felt he probably was privately. These three characters alone experience different pressures and circumstances, public and private, and, like different-angled lights shone through a prism, they reflect the wide and shifting scope of an individual's conception of self, both real and imagined, both as pursued fantasies and hidden realities. At the core of this story is an awareness of how we construct identity, how we both express and conceal self in the act of its construction, and how anxious we are in the act of revealing and concealing truth. The story begins with an artist so paralysed by the fear that their work of art will reveal too much of themself that they refuse to exhibit it. This meditation on artifice versus the authentic is also the root of much of Wilde's Queer subversion and sense of Camp. With it comes his trademark humour and satire that punctures the pretense of life, exposing its artifice and allowing us to laugh at its absurdity. In a work that explores the complexity of living authentically, Wilde entangles his characters in a world obsessed with pretense, where youth, beauty, pleasure, wealth, status, power, and the individual take primacy – all values that are finding their apotheosis in our age of late capitalism.

Wilde writes in the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: "There is no such thing as a moral or immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all." Some might interpret this as Wilde being morally ambivalent, but I do not see this as so. Rather, I see it as him lovingly embracing the

DIRECTOR'S NOTE: KIP WILLIAMS *(cont.)*

paradoxical forces that exist within the human condition; I see it as him attempting to truthfully express the problem of their collision; I see it as him empowering us to find an answer to the problem of our lives, both singular and collective. As he goes on to write "It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors".

The theatrical form (or mash up of cinema and theatre that I call cine-theatre) of this work, in concert with the adaptation of Wilde's book, are all responding to the above ideas, as well as to others that I would prefer for you to discover in experiencing our telling of this story. I have loved writing and directing this adaptation, and, above all, collaborating with EJ, Marg, Nick, Clemmie, David, Ian, Paige, and the incredible technical crew and production workshops and teams – all profoundly gifted storytellers - to conjure this tale into the present for you. Like Basil, we have each poured our soul into the making of this work, and we hope you find yourselves in it.

SYNOPSIS

Melancholic artist Basil Hallward has found exciting and revived inspiration in the beauty and grace of his latest portrait subject, the luminous and innocent Dorian Gray.

But when Hallward's louche and amoral acquaintance, Lord Henry Wotton, takes an interest in the young aristocrat and his impressionable mind, Hallward worries that Dorian's innocence will be forever marred.

Soon Wotton's influence and the glittering temptations of London during the Belle Époque transform the once wide-eyed and naive Dorian into a hardened and insatiable aesthete. But for all his many indulgences, Dorian's beauty and youth never seem to fade.

How does he do it?

And what of Hallward's beautiful portrait that captured Dorian before his spectacular fall from grace?

"It is through art, and only art, that we can realise our perfection"

OSCAR WILDE

***The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Eryn Jean Norvill.**
Photo: Daniel Boud

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

***The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Eryn Jean Norvill.**
Photo: Daniel Boud

DORIAN GRAY

Dorian Gray is the central character of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. He is an aristocrat who lives in London. During the course of the play, he journeys from the age of 20 to 38 years old, protected from the ravages of time by an unexplained moment of magic, whereby the passing of time and experience is recorded on his face in a portrait. In the original novel, the portrait is a traditional oil painting. In STC's production, the magic of Dorian's youthful appearance is heightened and exaggerated by the use of digital technology, such as face tuning.

Dorian is described by Basil Hallward as having a "simple and beautiful nature" (Wilde, pg. 5) and a stunningly beautiful appearance. Upon meeting Lord Henry Wotton and falling under his influence, Dorian begins the process of investigating his unspoken desires, jumping headlong into hedonism until, faced with the extremities of his own behaviour, drug addiction and murder, he decides to destroy the portrait, and himself.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS *(cont.)*

LORD HENRY WOTTON

Lord Henry Wotton is a wealthy aristocrat who spends his life in the pursuit of pleasure and beauty. Lord Henry's first appearance is described thus:

> *From the corner of the divan of Persian saddle-bags on which he was lying, smoking, as was his custom, innumerable cigarettes.... thin blue wreaths of smoke... curled up in.... fanciful whorls from his heavy, opium-tainted cigarette* (Wilde, pg. 2).

Lord Henry, attracted to Dorian's beauty and recognising his latent talent for sensuality, becomes Dorian's guide in the pursuit of pleasure. Their outing to the park after visiting Lady Agatha, noted in Chapter 3, marks the physical beginning of this process.

BASIL HALLWARD

Basil Hallward is a painter, absorbed in his creative life. He has a great deal of talent but prefers to spend his time developing his art, rather than promoting himself and his career. When he meets Dorian, he creates his most beautiful work, having fallen in love with him during the process. Hallward remains part of Dorian's life but falls out of communication with him as Dorian's life becomes increasingly out of control. Hallward is ultimately murdered by Dorian when Hallward realises the truth of Dorian's ugly soul.

SIBYL VANE

Sibyl Vane is an up-and-coming actress, with great talent and beauty. She falls in love with Dorian after having met him after one of her performances at the theatre. Once in love, Sibyl realises the futility of performing the truth of her emotional state. With Dorian and Lord Wotton in the audience, Sibyl performs an appalling rendition of her Shakespearean roles. Horrified by her inability to perform and embarrassed in front of his friends, Dorian ends their relationship. Sibyl dies by suicide that evening.

JAMES VANE

James Vane is the brother of Sibyl Vane. He has not forgotten or forgiven Dorian for his role in the death of Sibyl Vane and spends the remainder of his life searching for Dorian in an attempt to punish him.

ALAN CAMPBELL

Alan Campbell is an old friend of Dorian's. He was a brilliant student at Cambridge University and was renowned for his scientific work. Alan and Dorian were extremely close for nearly two years before their relationship crumbled. Alan dies by suicide after his final interaction with Dorian.

***The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Eryn Jean Norvill. Photo: Daniel Boud**

PRE-TEACHING *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY*

The following activities are designed to explore the issues and concerns of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Before the class begins this exploration, it is important for the students to understand the context that both Wilde and STC's production used to create meaning for the audience.

PRE-TEACHING RESOURCES

Contextualise early capitalism and the city of London using images and descriptions before launching into *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

- The clip below is a simple and short explanation of capitalism and where it came from. youtube.com/watch?v=PjctCS1kZp4
- The British Library Website has evocative images of Victorian London. View the images included by the British Library and discuss what can be seen, with particular reference to Victorian (Urban) Gothic tropes including fog, darkness, pollution, overcrowding and substance abuse. britishlibrary.cn/en/articles/slums
- The British Library offers an interesting virtual tour of its Oscar Wilde collection, investigating four works by Wilde and insight into his original publications. Examine these in groups, using the discussion of Aestheticism, Dandyism and Wilde's relationship with Victorian fashion. britishlibrary.cn/en/themes/wilde-the-web-and-the-world
- Understanding Oscar Wilde and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* should involve a respectful discussion about the homophobic world of London in the Victorian era. The clip below, from the Museum of London, provides a broad context for Wilde's experiences, beginning in the Georgian Period of English History, approximately 150 years before Wilde was born. The Labouchere Amendment to Section 11 of *Criminal Law Amendment Act* in 1885, can be seen to be the end result of 150 years of bourgeois homophobic agitation. The Labouchere Amendment was responsible for Wilde's imprisonment for homosexual acts. youtube.com/watch?v=-FetLc_Me3U
- The arrest and imprisonment of Thomas Boulton and Frederick Park could be used as an interesting case study of the treatment of working class homosexual men in England during Oscar Wilde's period. This case study reflects middle class anxiety about both homosexuality and the working classes. The link below is from the History Collection and outlines the arrest and trial of Boulton and Park, linking the sustained attack on the homosexual community in England with the idea that the working classes were a danger to the English way of life. Such anxiety culminated in the Labouchere Act in which homosexuality was outlawed in 1885. historycollection.com/the-cross-dressing-trial-that-scandalized-victorian-england/3

Classroom activities:

1. Discuss the images and documents that provide an insight into Victorian London provided above.
2. Place students into groups and create a series of five freeze frames that best represent the period in which Wilde was writing.
3. Find a piece of contemporary music that best represents the mood of Victorian London at that time and play it over the performance of the freeze frames.
4. Perform the freeze frames for the class and evaluate the mood created by the images and sound.
5. Place the students back into the same groups. Consider a contemporary equivalent to Victorian London and change the freeze frames if necessary. Find another piece of music that reflects the mood of the city that has been chosen by the group.
6. Questions to consider with the class include:
   - What are the similarities between the two images and the mood they created?
   - How could your group reimagine their chosen urban centre for a student devised production of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*?

THEMES & IDEAS

OSCAR WILDE AND HIS CONTEXT

Oscar Wilde was born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1854. The son of intellectuals, Wilde studied literature at university, both in Dublin and later at Oxford. During his youth and early adulthood, he wrote poetry and plays, publishing his own work in an attempt to catch the attention of the public and the critics. Wilde's first commercial success was the play *The Duchess of Padua*, which launched his reputation. Novels, poetry and plays soon followed, including *An Ideal Husband*, *Salome*, *The Happy Prince*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and his most famous work, *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

In 1895, Wilde became embroiled in a homosexual scandal involving his lover Lord Alfred 'Bosie' Douglas and Lord Douglas' father, the Marquess of Queensbury. The Marquess, angered by the affair between his son and Wilde, left a note for Wilde calling him a 'sodomite', a pejorative word used to describe a homosexual person. Wilde sued the Marquess of Queensbury for libel, who responded by offering evidence of Wilde's homosexuality. Wilde was ordered to stand trial for homosexual acts, lost the case and was imprisoned. After his release from prison, he left the United Kingdom for France, where he lived in poverty and died in 1900.

The Victorian period was one of immense change for England. The Industrial Revolution, having begun in England in 1750, meant that the British were the most technologically advanced country in the world. The British Empire was at its zenith, with colonists around the world extracting raw materials from the lands that they had invaded and transforming these materials into manufactured goods back in the United Kingdom. These were able to be resold globally, making huge profits. Factories were operated by the working class, who lived in poverty in the world's first industrial cities including London, Liverpool, Manchester and Glasgow. The newly emergent middle class expanded enormously, both in number and wealth, many of them leaving London for cleaner suburbs outside. Middle class women were, for the first time, confined to the home, looking after the domestic lives of their families. Middle class men went to work outside the home, earning the money required for their families. The upper class continued to establish and reinforce cultural norms, with the middle class keenly following their lead.

The increasing wealth of the middle and upper classes saw the emergence of particular types of men – the Dandy and the Aesthete. A Dandy was a man (often a 'Bachelor') who took particular pride in his appearance including his clothing, grooming, accessories and shoes as well as his refinement and wit. Originating from the upper middle classes, the Dandy revered the aristocracy and took great pride in aligning himself to the values of that particular societal group.

Wilde was a leading figure in the Aesthetic Movement. An Aesthete was a person who took great pride in their love of beauty and nature, usually expressed through art, music, literature and theatre. Over the course of the mid to late nineteenth century, Aesthetes sought to bring the human condition back to an appreciation of beauty, particularly as the development of industrial England meant that objects used by the ordinary person were being made by machine. Critics of the Aesthetes argued that the movement, in its extreme form, led to decadence and excess. To critics, this term meant that, in the pursuit of beauty and pleasure, and by extension a hedonistic lifestyle, the process of art making became extreme and ugly, moving beyond societal boundaries.

The Victorian period also saw the development of the study of sexuality, with academic disciplines emerging to research and control the ways in which humans understood and participated in their sexual lives. This research reflected the conservative values of the middle classes and established the cultural boundaries of a patriarchal, capitalist society. Those legal boundaries were reinforced by the laws of the period, including the Labouchere Amendment, which was ultimately used against Wilde in 1885, destroying his career, health and relationships.

The Labouchere Amendment to Section 11 of the *Criminal Law Amendment Act* made homosexual acts of 'gross indecency' illegal. Most homosexual people remained firmly in the closet for fear of their lives being destroyed, with trials such as Oscar Wilde's serving to reinforce the power of the law through the impact of the public disgrace that would follow.

THEMES & IDEAS *(cont.)*

CAPITALISM, CONSUMERISM AND IMAGE

Set in the city of London, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* examines the ways in which the economic system of capitalism engulfed, modified and defiled English society. It can be argued that Wilde, as a socialist, was critical of the extremes that the ravages of capitalism had on increasing inequality between the classes, which exacerbated middle and upper class fear of the ugliness, unruliness and unrest that appeared to lurk below them.

During the nineteenth century, London experienced the dislocating changes brought about by industrialisation, unregulated capitalism and urbanisation and, unable to keep up with the pace of change, became increasingly polluted, dirty and disease ridden. By the time Wilde was writing *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, London was a metaphor for the extreme social, political and economic inequalities of capitalism and more importantly, had become synonymous with the working class.

It was thought that London's class system was reflected in the geography of the city, with wealth and privilege broadly situated in the west of the city, and poverty, crime and disadvantage broadly situated in the east. Wilde appears to follow the tropes of Victorian Gothic Literature – that wealth and beauty are found in the West End of London, whilst the grotesque and debauched are found in the East:

> *Dorian watched with listless eyes the sordid shame of the great city...the way seemed interminable, and the streets like the black web of some sprawling spider.* (Wilde pg. 44)

Wilde, however, challenged the rather simplistic Victorian Gothic trope of conflating ugliness, disease and crime with the working classes. Sibyl Vane dies by suicide in the wealthy West End after Dorian's appalling treatment of her. Basil Hallward is murdered in Dorian's home in the heart of fashionable London and his crime, covered up by Alan Campbell, results in Campbell's suicide. Most tellingly, Dorian Gray's portrait, the permissive centre and cause of Dorian's excess, is kept in the heart of the West End. Wilde's London challenged the notion that the poor were inherently defective, criminal and lazy. Instead, Wilde locates the greed of the wealthy as the subterranean decay that should be explored and acknowledged.

The increasing gulf between working people and the middle/upper classes was reinforced by the emergence of the cultural phenomenon of the Dandy. The Dandy was the ultimate consumer, searching endlessly for new ways to present their image of themselves to those around them – their audience. The Dandy is a product of consumer capitalism, which relies on relentless economic growth to create new and enticing products for consumption. The Dandy is both the consumer and the consumed, the creator and seeker of sensation and the person who looks at and is gazed upon. Relentless economic production, the creation of extremes of wealth and poverty, and the cultural positioning of the upper classes as leaders of fashion meant that men like Dorian Gray and Lord Henry Wotton were able to spend excessive amounts of money on their clothing, grooming, shoes and accessories, redefining what was considered fashionable and driving consumption of consumer goods onward.

Director Kip Williams' vision of London as a contemporary metaphor for Western capitalism, is similarly grotesque in its inequality. Williams explores images of extremes of wealth, extravagance and excess, exacerbated by social media. Dorian's images of himself, curated using digital media, show the destructive forces of capitalism and its impulse to co-opt the quest for youth and beauty, for a profit.

Classroom activities:

The Picture of Dorian Gray describes the East End of London in the following way:

> *...the streets (were) like the black web of some sprawling spider. Now and then fantastic shadows were silhouetted against some lamplit blind.... They moved like monstrous marionettes and made gestures like live things...Over the low rooftops and jagged chimney stacks of the houses rose the black masts of ships.* (Wilde pg. 44)

The opium den is described thus:

> *Dorian winced and looked around at the grotesque things that lay in such fantastic postures on the ragged mattress. The twisted limbs, the gaping mouths, the staring lustreless eyes...* (Wilde pg. 45)

THEMES & IDEAS *(cont.)*

- Make a list of the identifiable tropes found in Victorian (urban) Gothic. Then, list of the ways in which we might describe a contemporary city? Underworld? Are there similarities?
- Make a list of the way in which the set designer, Marg Horwell, has used these tropes to create a sense of both Victorian London and a contemporary urban world? How does shadow contribute to a sense of looming destruction?
- Use the list of words to design a contemporary urban landscape for the stage in groups. Once completed, present to the class and explain the reasons for your choices.
- Evaluate Marg Horwell's design. How has she used the Elements of Production to visually represent ugliness underneath a surface of beauty?

***The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Eryn Jean Norvill. Photo: Daniel Boud**

YOUTH, BEAUTY AND THE SENSES

As an Aesthete, Wilde believed that meaning was created through artistic endeavour – art, music, literature and theatre. The creation of beauty and the pursuit of pleasure was the pinnacle of the artistic process. One lived one's life in pursuit of beauty. At the most extreme, it is a performance of oneself for the benefit of others. Additionally, the pursuit of these values was a reflection of economic status, as wealthy upper middle class people had the disposable income to maintain such a lifestyle.

The relationship between youth, beauty, art, pleasure, performance and capitalism is one that Wilde examines in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, offering the audience a critique of the extremes of the quest for beauty, youth and pleasure for its own sake. Dorian's focus on his image through adornment, excess and the ever escalating exploration of his senses, enabled by the wealth of his class, sees him ultimately destroyed by the values that have shaped him. Consumption without restraint leads to extremes – decadence, ugliness, violence and criminality. This is particularly the case when operating within, and enabled by, unregulated, capitalist market forces.

It could be argued that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* invites the audience to enter the world of consumer culture and to celebrate youth, beauty and image. By embracing consumer culture, the artistry of creating your own identity through aesthetic curation is a cause for celebration. Indeed, Dorian shapes his own identity and the culture of London in his own image, free of middle class moral constraints. Gray's transgression of social conventions can redefine what is culturally acceptable for all.

Williams' production examines the end result of consumer culture over a century after Wilde began to interrogate it. Excessive consumption in the guise of fast fashion, rapidly changing image and identity, the obsession with youth and beauty, the emergence of the 'influencer', rapid technological change and evolving digital culture have taken Dorian's world further than Wilde could have imagined.

STC's reimagining of the work suggests that Dorian's celebration of excess and image, with the resulting inner battle with his conscience, has become more extreme as

THEMES & IDEAS *(cont.)*

we've moved further away from the Victorian period. The multiplicity of Dorian's image, projected into the space, larger than life, highlights the obsessive focus of contemporary social media. The quest to curate one's own life has resulted in our preference for image over reality, blurring the lines of what we know about ourselves and others. Where the representation of reality becomes the reality, enabled by global capitalism, ugliness and exploitation of human beings ensues.

Classroom activities:

1. Place students in groups and provide a selection of magazines. Each group should find four images of idealised beauty and remove them from the magazine. These images are likely to be in advertisements or stylised photography of famous people.
2. As a group, create the poses and facial expressions from each image until the group has a routine of stylised poses. Present these images to the class and analyse them. Questions that could be asked include:
   - What adjectives could be used to describe the physicality and atmosphere created by these routines?
   - How are these images different from what we expect from people in real life?
3. Remain in the same groups and choose one of the quotes below. Perform the dialogue using the routines that have been developed in class. Questions that could be asked post performance could include:
   - How does the performance of beauty and image change the way humans relate?
   - What do you think it might be like if we presented ourselves like this all the time?

Dorian: *OH! I am tired of sitting and I don't want a life-sized portrait of myself*. (Wilde pg. 5)

Basil: *One of the great secrets of life is to cure the soul by means of the senses, and the senses by means of the soul. You are a wonderful creation. You have the most marvellous youth, and youth is the one thing worth having.* (Wilde pg. 8)

Dorian: *You filled me with a wild desire to know everything about life...I determined to go out in search of some adventure. About half-past eight I passed by an absurd little theatre, with great flaming gas-jets and gaudy playbills*. (Wilde pg. 16)

Dorian: *It was the strangest book he had ever read... a study of a certain young Parisian who spent his life trying to realise...all the passions and modes of thought that belonged to every century except his own. It was a poisonous book.* (Wilde pg. 30)

Dorian: *In one way he was more fortunate than the novel's fantastic hero. For the wonderful beauty that had so fascinated Basil Hallward, and many others besides him, never seemed to leave him*. (Wilde pg. 31)

Basil Hallward: *I don't believe those rumours at all. At least I can't believe them when I see you. Sin is a thing that writes itself across a man's face. It cannot be concealed*. (Wilde pg. 36)

***The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Eryn Jean Norvill. Photo: Daniel Boud**

THEMES & IDEAS *(cont.)*

IDENTITY: IMAGE AND REALITY

STC's theatrical reminaging of Wilde's work extends the logic of Gray's world to the present, examining image, self obsession, pleasure and material consumption within a digital culture.

Williams' production foregrounds the modern obsession with digital images of ourselves in our quest for beauty, youth and perfection. The painting, magically able to hold and retain life experiences of increasing depravity, becomes a synonym for social media, in which a contemporary Dorian is able to remain youthful, beautiful and unravaged by time and experience. Dorian's identity relies on the creation of his image by performing it to the outside world. Without the performance of himself as youthful and beautiful, Dorian has no identity. The creative vision of the production suggests that, like Dorian, contemporary society mistakes the images we curate of ourselves as reality. The end result of this obsession is to confuse the difference between the real and the imaginary. Dorian's final destructive act, the slashing of his own picture in the original text, becomes the moment when the destruction of image causes the death of the real self.

The use of digital media in this production of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* reinforces this logic, offering the audience Dorian as both a 'live' subject and a 'digital' one in the same performance space, blurring the audience's understanding of the 'real' Dorian. Much of Dorian's world is created behind screens, both set pieces and digital, which directs audience focus to the projected image, mirroring our experiences within a digital culture. The large size of the projectors reminds us that, metaphorically, the reach of the digital image is enormous. As Dorian's narrative progresses, the screens multiply and move, reinforcing the pervasive nature of the digital image. The audience becomes an active participant in Dorian's story by actively encouraging the same decisions as the ones that Dorian is making – Where do I look? Which image is real? And the final decision is a question for us all – who am I if I am not represented digitally?

***The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Eryn Jean Norvill.**
Photo: Daniel Boud

THEMES & IDEAS *(cont.)*

IDENTITY: GENDER AND DESIRE

The Picture of Dorian Gray was the first work of mainstream English fiction to represent male homosexual desire in a way that, whilst unstated, was clear in its subtext. As such, it was a groundbreaking work. STC's production continues this narrative, presenting the desires of Basil Hallward, Lord Henry Wotton and Dorian Gray with traditional methods of subtext and wit, combined with a Camp aesthetic – extravagance, excess and flamboyance, whilst acknowledging that the contemporary discussions about identity have shifted since then.

As part of contemporary dialogue around queer identity, the choice in casting one actor as Dorian and all the other characters, challenges traditional ways of representing gender. This choice is established at the beginning as the narrator, dressed neutrally, adds and removes props and then costumes as characters enter and exit the narrative.

- *The Picture of Dorian Gray* suggests that identity doesn't exist without image. How does the play present this point of view?

Ultimately, the costumes become increasingly extravagant and androgynous, mirroring Dorian's pursuit of pleasure and also Norvill and Williams' vision of gender as a performance The seamless change of costume and pace of the frequent changes, combined with the impact of the digital projections of images of Norvill, blurs a traditional understanding of gender and renders it obsolete.

Classroom activities:

The multiplicity of images in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* suggests a multiplicity of identities. The following moments from STC's production explore the complexity of modern identity.

Allocate each moment to different groups in the class.

A. Hallward threatens to destroy the painting, lest it come between the three men.

   Hallward: *You both have made me hate the finest piece of work I have ever done, and I will destroy it. What is it but canvas and colour?*
   Dorian: *Don't, Basil, don't! It would be murder!*
   Hallward: *I shall stay with the real Dorian* (Wilde pg. 10)

B. Present STC's images of Lord Henry having dinner with Dorian, Lady Agatha, the Duchess of Harley, Sir Thomas Burdon, Mr. Erskine of Treadley and Mrs Vandeleur. Discuss the use of digital projection, multimedia and the way in which the character of Lord Henry, played by the same actor as the other characters, have a conversation over dinner. This group will consider the following questions and, using the device of a dinner party, discuss their answers.
   - What is the effect of a live actor having a conversation with virtual characters?
   - Does the audience make a distinction between the reality of the live actor/character and the digital actor/characters? Why or why not?
   - What does this scene from STC's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* suggest about human identity?

C. Youth and beauty are a key way that Dorian understands himself – it is the basis for the creation of his image and identity. Provide one group with as many images as possible of STC's production of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Divide the images into those with flowers and those without.
   - Brainstorm the places that flowers are found both on the set and with Dorian. Make a list to share with the class.
   - Using their understanding of the play and STC's production, students write a monologue for Dorian that explains what the flowers about him represent for him and why they are important to understanding him. Present to the class for discussion.

D. Explore the way that the convention of transformational acting is established in STC's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Place students into pairs and take on the role of the actor or the director. Each pair should be provided with two props. These props could be similar to the ones that Norvill uses to establish both Basil Hallward and Lord Henry Wotton (i.e.. a cigarette and a paintbrush) but if this is not appropriate, the cigarette could be replaced by a top hat or scarf. Use the following exchanges between Lord Henry and Basil to explore the physicality required to create and sustain two different characters for the audience. Present to the audience.

THEMES & IDEAS *(cont.)*

Lord Henry: *It is your best work, Basil, the best thing you have ever done.*
Basil: *I don't think I shall send it anywhere.*
Lord Henry: *Not send it anywhere? My dear fellow, why?*
Basil: *I know you will laugh at me, but I really can't exhibit it. I have put too much of myself in it.* (Wilde pg. 2)

Evaluate with the class using the following questions:

- As an actor, how did you use your performance skills to create the two characters? Did the props help you? How?
- As a director, how did you work with the actor to create distinctions between the two characters?
- As an audience, how effective was the performance? Why? Did the props help you to make an easy distinction between the characters? How? Why do you think the director started with this simple technique?

Class discussion:

Once the students have worked on these moments, present them to the audience. Facilitate a discussion with the class about identity. The following questions could be useful:

- The creation of an individual's image is a complex process. What does STC's production of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* say about the challenges faced in a digital world?
- The identity of an individual involves their understanding of their gender identity. How has William's vision of gender as a performance developed Wilde's exploration of identity?

Writing task:

Write a PETEAL (Point, Explain, Technique, Example, Analysis, Link) paragraph that answers the following questions:

- *The Picture of Dorian Gray* suggests that contemporary identity doesn't exit without image. How does the STC's production present this point of view?

***The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Eryn Jean Norvill.**
Photo: Daniel Boud

THEMES & IDEAS *(cont.)*

TRANSGRESSION, CONSUMERISM AND RELATIONSHIPS

Wilde understands that the conflicting impulses in human beings to be safe, stable and understood co-exist with the deeply unsettling desire for freedom, adventure and new visions of oneself. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* explores the impulse of humans to transgress boundaries – whether social, cultural, economic or individual – in the attempt to see and understand oneself in new ways.

The development of Dorian's character and his journey into hedonism goes beyond societal and cultural norms in ever escalating behaviours, initially guided by Lord Henry and the pursuit of sensual pleasure. It is, however, the lack of consequences for Dorian, symbolised in Hallward's portrait, that allows Dorian's quest to become increasingly extreme. Dorian fails to understand that his sense of self and pursuit of meaning cannot be sought externally. Rather, in his quest to have a fulfilling life in which he knows and understands himself, he gazes outward to see himself reflected back in the eyes of others.

The audience finds itself transfixed by Dorian's extravagance. Simultaneously, his excesses – his willingness to exceed societal limits in behaviour – enables the audience to watch, literally and metaphorically, as their understanding of accepted boundaries is challenged and redefined. The audience watching an actor, watching multiple projections of the actor, watching an actor create and project images of herself whilst being watched by the audience, reminds us that these conflicting impulses are embedded within us all.

Williams and Norvill have continued to explore the creation of self and identity in a contemporary era, taking the logic of consumer capitalism through to its current point. Digital technology, like Hallward's portrait, allows the external to be represented to us, but now, rather than having a single image of one's youth and beauty, the impulse and ability to curate beauty and retain our youth has escalated and multiplied. This has resulted in confusion about where meaning might be found for individuals and what it might be.

The impact of global capital's consumer culture with an emphasis on the external and resultant desolation of inner lives, has been explored in this production. Previously, Wilde linked the discussion of consumer culture to the provision of luxury goods to create the external sense of individuality. In his adaptation Williams continues the conversation begun by Oscar Wilde, identifying the impact of consumerism on human relationships, with the commodification of others for our own purposes becoming increasingly evident. Contemporary consumer economy also emphasises the importance of service and experience, encouraging our propensity to seek the feelings generated by adventure and stimulation at the expense of human relationships. Coupled with the decline in empathy generated by digital culture, the disposability of other humans becomes part of the process of continuing the individual's journey toward self fulfilment.

Classroom Activities

- Research the types of free face altering, photo editing apps available online. Make a class list of the promises they make about changing your image. What is currently beautiful?
- Research the plastic surgery apps available. Make a class list of the promises they make about changing your image. What is currently on trend?
- Research beauty and body trends from the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. How have they changed? How has the human body been commodified and changed over time? What impact might that have on those bodies?
- Once this process is completed, move into groups. Improvise a multimedia inspired performance that uses the extract below exploring the way in which contemporary apps encourage people to transgress accepted boundaries of image, age and enhancement.

> *London grew drunk on his excess. It was indeed a new age. Life became a dazzling plethora of 'more', a glittering cornucopia of 'next', a shimmering superfluidity of 'yes, yes, yes, now, now, now, me, me, me'! Dorian's body danced free and wild to the beat of a drum he had always known but never allowed himself to hear. Summer followed summer, and the yellow jonquils bloomed and died many times, and nights of horror repeated the story of their shame, but he was unchanged. No winter marred his face or stained its flowerlike bloom.* (Wilde pg. 33)

FORM, STYLE & CONVENTIONS

The STC's version of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was adapted from Wilde's novel by Kip Williams.

The fusion of different theatrical forms and styles creates a sense of the inner world of Dorian Gray as he responds to his inner desires.

HEIGHTENED REALISM AND MONOLOGUE

Heightened Realism is an exaggeration of the theatrical style of Realism.

Realism aims to recreate the experience of real life on the stage using all available theatrical elements, including acting, the elements of production and the narrative. The ultimate aim of Realism is to create an empathetic, emotional response in the audience.

Heightened Realism is the exaggeration of the conventions of Realism in order to create a more intense emotional experience for the audience. This means that the acting, elements of production and narrative are 'larger than life' so that the emotions generated in the audience are felt more keenly. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, set in the twilight of the Victorian era and exploring issues of image, hedonism and consumerism, relies on the creation of excess and extravagance to comment on a world without restraint.

A monologue is a performance by one actor. It can be the performance of a long piece of dialogue within a play. Or, it can be a production that contains only one actor. STC's production of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a monologue in which one actor plays 26 different roles. These roles are created through a combination of live performance, live video and pre-recorded video, commenting on the creation and curation of one's image in a digital world.

The creation of characters in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* relies on the technique of transformational acting, in which one actor is able to transform instantly between the creation of character/role. Actors will change their movement, gesture, physicality, facial expressions, voice, pace and energy as part of this process. Additionally, the use of the Elements of Production, including props and costume can aid the actor to create this change for the audience

MULTIDISCIPLINARY THEATRE

Multidisciplinary Theatre challenges traditional representations and conventional dramatic narrative in a highly visual form through new and traditional theatre technologies. The process by which new and traditional theatre technologies are deployed depends on the vision of the artist or company. Linearity, traditional dialogue and representations of character are challenged in order to create a multiplicity of meaning for an audience. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the creative decision to work with Multidisciplinary Theatre, with particular emphasis on digital projection, has brought Wilde's obsession with youth, beauty and image into the twenty-first century in a visual and evocative way.

COMEDY OF MANNERS

A Comedy of Manners satirises the values and beliefs of a particular group in society – usually those groups that enjoy a large degree of privilege. This style of comedy relies on exaggerated characters, sophisticated word play and witty verbal sparring. Oscar Wilde was considered to be the master of the epigram, which is a short, witty saying that makes a statement about the human condition.

CAMP

Camp is not a theatrical style but rather a way of being in the world. It has been generated over time by queer people as a response to long periods of oppression and invisibility. Camp involves a parody of human interactions through gesture, posture, voice, movement, style, decoration, and design. It is often ironic, exaggerated and theatrical. Over history, queer people have relied on Camp to communicate their experience of the world to those who understood, without placing themselves in danger of being prosecuted for their identities. Oscar Wilde, with his command of witticisms, dandified appearance and love of artistic expression, relied on a Camp aesthetic to communicate his lived experience.

VICTORIAN (URBAN) GOTHIC

A literary style rather than a theatrical one, Victorian (Urban) Gothic is a collection of tropes (a recurrent theme

FORM, STYLE & CONVENTIONS *(cont.)*

or collection of images) that represent London in Victorian England. Generated out of the extremities of urbanisation, industrialisation and capitalism, Victorian (Urban) Gothic represents the cultural anxieties generated by the uncontrolled expansion of London. Victorian (Urban) Gothic tropes include representations of dirt, disease, filth and alcohol abuse. Fog was a regular occurrence as a result of the pollution generated by factories. Gas lighting created shadows between circles of light, encouraging the fear of hidden criminals. Prostitution, alcoholism and opium use were commonplace. London was divided into vastly different spatial categories, with the wealthy living completely different lives to the poor. The East End of London was described as a 'different country', separated from the rest of the city by extreme poverty, disease and dysfunction.

***The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Eryn Jean Norvill.**
Photo: Daniel Boud

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