17BAE01 GCE English Literature

Folder 1

'In Gothic Literature writers often use monstrous characterisation in order to present ideas about the darkness of human nature'.

With reference to your wider reading around *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde and *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, compare how both writers use monstrous characterisation to explore ideas about human nature.

In both *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde and *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, the authors explore the darker side of human nature through monstrous characters. Both of these novels centre around monstrous characters, where their monstrosity is enhanced by psychological and sexual elements. Within *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian is an innocent young gentleman, corrupted by society, whereas in *Dracula*, The Count is inherently evil to represent the innate darkness within man. Monstrous characterisation is a common feature of Gothic literature, usually used to magnify societal fears. At the turn of the century, societal fears were mainly a result of the consequences of scientific experimentation, sexual depravity and moving away from the moral values emphasised in the Romantic period, all of which the monsters in these novels could represent to enhance the authors' exploration of the darkness of human nature.

One way in which Wilde uses monstrous characters to explore the darkness of human nature in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is through the idea that the dark side of human nature is a result of society. Wilde explores this through the characterisation of Dorian, developing his character from innocent to monstrous. At the start of the novel, Wilde utilises floral symbols to express Dorian's purity, first introducing Dorian as "burying his face in the great cool lilac blossoms"[1], and surrounding him with "nodding lilies"[2], (Victorian symbols of purity), and "thin blue petals"[3], delicate imagery connoting to innocence and boyhood. Linking Dorian so closely to nature suggests he is far removed from the "terror of society"[4], and ultimately it is Lord Henry, who represents Victorian society through his active social life in the novel, who creates Dorian's new, monstrous identity, "To a large extend the lad was his own creation"[5], where Lord Henry himself says "To influence a person is to give him one's own soul."[6] . We see the effect of this throughout the novel, as Dorian begins to mirror Lord Henry's ideas and theories, ""Ah! That is one of Harry's views, isn't it, Mr Gray?"[7]. Furthermore, Lord Henry plays a crucial role in Dorian's first monstrous act- his cruelty to Sibyl Vane. Wilde again uses floral imagery in connection with Sibyl Vane's appearance, with similes such as "flower-like face"[8], and metaphors such as" the curves of her throat were the curves of a white lily"[9] to link her to purity and what Dorian once was. Wilde effectively transforms Sibyl's womanly curves, which would usually sexualise her, into the pure image of a lily, ensuring that she is undoubtedly innocent. In emphasising her beauty and innocence, Dorian's cruelty towards her is intensified in the eyes of the reader, thus making him more monstrous. The use of similar language surrounding both Dorian and Sibyl ties the characters together and Wilde makes it seem as though their relationship is natural when he constructs an idyllic setting in "the birds that were singing in the dew drenched garden seemed to be telling the flowers about her"[10]. Yet the Lord Henry (the very embodiment of Victorian society) disapproves of her relationship with Dorian, resulting in Dorian's cruel actions, "Cruelty! Had he been cruel?"[11], possibly suggesting that society is unnatural in its

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[1] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, page 19.
[2] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, page 86.
[3] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, page 87.
[4] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, page 17.
[5] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, page 55.
[6] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, page 16.
[7] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, page 44.
[8] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, page 49.
[9] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, page 80.
[10] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, page 89.
[11] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, page 88.

views as it appears to go against nature. It could be said that Lord Henry ultimately acts as a representative of 'The Age of Enlightenment', "we should appeal to Science"[12], thus his corruption of Dorian's innocence can be seen as a result of the monstrosities which the Age of Enlightenment brings. Meanwhile Basil may represent the Romantic Era, where the painter represents the emphasis on art and emotion during this time, "You like your art better than your friends."[13]. Basil acts as a moral influence on Dorian, attempting to protect him from Lord Henry's immorality, "Don't spoil him. Don't try and influence him."[14] and begs him to "Pray, Dorian, pray"[15], thus Wilde may be suggesting that the Romantic Era was much more moral than turn of the century England.

Alternatively, Wilde may be suggesting that involving oneself too much in art creates monstrous characters. Victorian society heralded the movement of 'Aestheticism', which stated that art should be art for the sake of art and have no deeper meaning. In Victorian society many carried this into their moral views, acting to increase the beauty and enjoyment in life regardless of whether it was immoral. Lord Henry represents this, saying "We live in an age where men treat art as if it were meant to be a form of autobiography. We have lost all sense of abstract beauty."[16] . This is supported by the origin of the painting, Basil claims that the portrait contains "the secret of his *(own)* soul.", and it is ultimately the painting which allows Dorian to keep his youth and beauty, "I would give my soul for that!". Although it is Lord Henry's immoral influence which unleashes the dark side of Dorian's nature, it was facilitated by Basil's art. Critics, such as Patrick Duggan, agree that, although Wilde was a leader in the aestheticism movement, *The Picture of Dorian* Gray is a critique of how "Aestheticism too often aligns itself with immorality"[17]. Essentially, Wilde uses Dorian to show how those who are innocent cannot survive such a cruel and superficial society, with Sibyl Vane taking her own life because she could not stand to live in a society where men were so cruel. Dorian, unable to live with his own guilt kills himself, leaving Lord Henry the only main character who lives, possibly suggesting that conforming to society is the only way to survive without becoming a monster.

Contrastingly, in Dracula, Stoker presents the darkness in human nature as inherent within mankind through the monstrous character of Count Dracula. Stoker often utilises setting to reflect the natural wildness of man. Count Dracula's dwelling is in the mysterious Transylvania, "We are in Transylvania; and Transylvania is not England."[18] It is a common feature of Gothic literature to use unfamiliar, exotic settings to enhance the elements of horror within the text . Though the setting used is deeply rooted in nature, Stoker often uses premodifying adjectives to create disturbing images within nature such as "frowning rocks"[19], where the personification again links to the cold emotions to be found at castle Dracula, "ghost like clouds"[20] and "jagged rock and pointed crags"[21]. The harsh setting reflects the cruelty of Dracula himself. This goes against Gothic conventions, as at the time of most Gothic writings, nature was seen as a 'healing' force, used to restore health, thus using nature as a harsh force suggests that Harker has truly entered a monstrous place. Dracula is further linked with the wild, dark sides of nature through his connection with "howling wolves" [22] which he calls "children of the night, what music they make!"[23], suggesting that not only is Dracula in control of the darkest, most violent side of nature, but feels that their cries are a form of beauty.

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[12] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, page 39.
[13] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, page 25.
[14] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, page 13.
[15] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, page 154.
[16] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, page 11.
[17] Patrick Duggan, *The Conflict Between Aestheticism and Morality in 'Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray'*
[18] Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, page 28.
[19] Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, page 18.
[20] Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, page 15.
[21] Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, page 11.

[22] Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, page 19.
[23] Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, page 25.

Stoker further gives Dracula's appearance animalistic qualities such as his fingernails being "cut to a sharp point"[24] and having "hair in the centre of his palm"[25] creating ambiguity between animal and man, possibly suggesting that Dracula's monstrous actions are simply the animalistic side of human nature. This uses a typical feature of Gothic writing, where it was common to have the appearance of a character reflect their inner nature, an idea which many in Victorian society believed to be true in reality. Dracula's remote location further corroborates with a popular ideology at the time, the ideology of Jean Jacques Rousseau, which states that "Society imposes restrictions upon the individual", possibly Stoker is suggesting through the Count's monstrous characterisation that when an individual becomes far removed from the strict Victorian society, they find their true self, becoming immoral and monstrous creatures.

A further way in which both authors use monstrous characterisation to express ideas regarding the darkness of human nature is through the theme of sexuality. In the picture of Dorian Gray, Dorian's sexuality becomes ever more prominent as the novel progresses, where "Women who had wildly adored him"[26] were "seen to grow pallid with shame or horror"[27], and his "charm"[28] is "strange and dangerous"[29], suggesting that his sexual prowess makes him a threat to society. This could be Wilde's critique of Victorian society, in that although Dorian is seen as beautiful, he is still a monster inflicted upon society which believes "Manners are more important than morals"[30], showing how social status is seen as more important than character, thus, although he is highly placed in society, he is more monstrous than his peers. Wilde further suggests that society's views are flawed concerning sexuality, he writes of "monstrous laws"[31] concerning what is "forbidden", most likely referring to Victorian's intolerance of homosexuality. At the beginning of the novel, Wilde suggests that there is a sexual tension between Dorian and Basil at the, where Dorian "strangely stirred"[32] Basil, with the use of sibilance adding a sensuality to the phrase. Basil further states "We were quite close, almost touching. Our eyes met again."[33], where the short sentences increase the tension in a scene centred around Dorian and Basil's physical interactions, and Lord Henry says "he had a wild adoration for you *(Dorian)*"[34]. Again, when Dorian murders Basil, Wilde writes that he is overcome with "mad passions"[35], these passions could be his sexual passions, or his rage at his sexual attraction to Basil. This is a societal critique of the oppression of homosexuality at the time, where those who were homosexual had to repress their sexuality to prevent being punished by law. Overall, Dorian's sexual promiscuity can be seen as enhancing his monstrosity, yet his possible sexual repression may suggest that the darker side of human nature is exposed when people are oppressed.

Likewise in *Dracula* Stoker uses sexuality to enhance the Count's monstrous character, though to a greater extent than in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Dracula's brides are described as animalistic in their sexual advances to Harker. Stoker uses the simile "she actually licked her lips like an animal"[36], strongly linking their sexuality with monstrous behaviour. This would have played on societal fears at the time, as the sexual liberation of women was considered a threat to masculinity. Furthermore, Harker's reaction brings into question Victorian views regarding sexuality, in that he

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[24] Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, page 25.
[25] Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, page 25.
[26] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, page 182.
[27]Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, page 182.
[28] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, page 182.
[29] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, page 182.
[30] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, page 182.
[31] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, page 30.
[32] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, page 7.
[33] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, page 7.
[34] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, page 212.
[35] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, page 154.
[36] [36] Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, page 45.

finds it to be both "thrilling and repulsive"[37], reflecting the conflict Harker feels about this sexual act. Stoker emphasises this conflict when he uses the sensory language when he describes the female vampire's breath as having "bitter underlying the sweet". This again links to the idea that society represses the darkness of human nature, whereby Harker is free to find sexual promiscuity "thrilling" now that he is away from society and his beloved Mina. Critics agrees with this idea, though some suggest that 'temptation made the "unnatural" occurrence of female sexual advances desirable"[38] , emphasising the idea that Harker is driven by that which cannot be expressed in society. This sexuality alarmingly travels back to what is deemed as "civilised society" whereby Lucy becomes sexually fixated, seeming to put Arthur "under a spell"[39], whereby the use of "spell" suggests that this is supernatural, playing on the societal fears regarding women's sexuality being seen as depraved. It seems as though since Harker removed himself from society, the darkness within man, such as sexual desire in the eyes of Victorian society, has followed him back to his civilised lifestyle at home, suggesting that the darkness of man is inescapable. The sexualisation of Lucy further draws a contrast between the expectations of women at the time, Lucy appears to be the ideal Victorian woman, concerned mostly with what "men like women to be"[40] and acting as the embodiment of an "Angel of the House" (the societal expectation for Victorian women), seeming to be loved by all "they seemed to fall in love with her at once" with no less than three high class men asking for her hand in marriage, yet ultimately she falls prey to the Count, and Stoker uses this sexuality to twist the idea that sexual liberation brings depravity, where Lucy's perfect conformity to an obedient, weak woman makes her vulnerable to the Count's sexuality. This may be Stoker criticising the strict social judgement on sexuality. An alternative interpretation is that Dracula is a manifestation of homosexuality. When Dracula protects Harker from the sexual prowess of his wives, he says "This man belongs to me!", suggesting he has a sexual claim over John Harker and furthermore the metaphor of 'bloodsucking' may be a metaphor for oral sex between men. Critics such as Schaffer agree with the idea that Dracula is the embodiment of Victorian's fears regarding homosexuality, stating that "symbolically, blood is interchangeable with semen"[41]. *Dracula* was written a month after Oscar Wilde's imprisonment for homosexuality, which may have inspired Stoker in his writings. Like in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, sexuality is used to enhance the monstrosity of characters, exploring the idea that sex is a main drive in the darker side of human nature.

Another way in which both authors present the darkness of human nature is through the psychological elements of the monstrous characters. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* it can be said that Dorian has a split psychology, where Lord Henry could be said to represent the selfish desires which Dorian feels, "conscience makes egoists of us all"[42]. On the other end, Basil Hallward acts as the moral side of Dorian's personality, where he implores Dorian to look to God and repent "The prayer of your repentance will be answered"[43], and Basil's work becomes "the visible emblem of conscience"[44]. This coincides with a popular theory of Freud's, that the personality is split into three parts: the id, ego and superego. The id (the selfish desires) could be Lord Henry, the superego (the morals) and the ego could be Dorian, who must find a balance between the two, yet his reliance on Harry ('the id') drives him to monstrosity. Furthermore, Wilde goes against convention by juxtaposing Dorian's monstrous psychology and his beautiful appearance. "Those finely-shaped fingers could never have clutched a knife for sin"[45] yet when Dorian exposes his soul, through the

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[37] [37] Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, page 45.
[38] Amanda. M. Podonsky, *Bram Stoker's Dracula: A Reflection and Rebuke of Victorian Society*

[39] Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, page 303.
[40] Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, page 83.
[41] Talia Schaffer, *A Wilde Desire Took Me: A History of Homoeroticism in Dracula.*
[42] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, page 99.
[43] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* page 154.
[44] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, page 89.
[45] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, page 172.

portrait, to Hallward and Hallward exclaims "It has the eyes of the devil." Where the article "it", dehumanises Dorian, thus suggests that his degradation of morality has resulted in his complete loss of self. It was around the time that both the novels were written, that Sigmund Freud started publishing his theories (1895) and psychology started to emerge as a subject. Through this awareness, Wilde may have decided to use the novel as a means pf explaining the darker side of human psychology.

Similarly, in Dracula, Stoker uses psychological elements to explain the monstrous side of human nature. Stoker uses a common Gothic device in using a 'double' to explain the split psychology of John Harker. It could be sad that The Count's monstrous characterisation is meant to represent the dark side of John's human nature. This is most clearly seen when Stoker uses the symbol of a mirror. There is a moment where John is using his "shaving glass"[46] and both Dracula and Harker are shown in the same mirror, yet there was "no reflection of [Dracula] in the mirror!"[47]. As both of them are present, yet only Harker is seen in the mirror, it could be said that they are metaphorically the same person, with Dracula representing John's monstrous side. The shaving glass further became "shattered into a thousand pieces", as John can no longer see his reflection, this can be seen as his loss of identity now that he is away from society. This may be working from one of Freud's popular theories at the time- the urge of Thantos. This theory states that humans are driven by innately selfish desires, such as violence and sex, which enable us to survive, thus Dracula's characterisation could reflect this[48].

Overall, both novels are an exploration of the fine line between monsters and men. Whereas in Wilde's novel, it is suggested that monstrosity is a result of the oppressive Victorian society, in Stoker's *Dracula* he suggests that monstrosity is an innate feature of human nature. Both were written at similar times, where psychology was a main feature of society and led to the self-questioning along with questioning society. Both of these novels act as critiques of society, by manifesting societal fears in the monstrous characters. Arguably, Oscar Wilde's depiction of Dorian Gray is a more in depth exploration of human nature, as the development of his character displays how men can turn into monsters, in comparison with Dracula's monstrosity.

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[46] Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, page 33.

[47] Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, page 32.

[48] Sigmund Freud, *The Complete Works*, page 52.

Word count =2796

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