MORAL DETERIORATION OF ENGLISH SOCIETY IN VICTORIAN ERA AS SEEN IN OSCAR WILDE’S THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

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Abstract
This research aims to analyze the moral deterioration of English society in the Victorian Era in the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde. Specifically, this research analyzes the reason for the moral deterioration of English society in the Victorian era and how moral deterioration affects British society. This study uses the theological theory by Ted Peter to analyze the selling soul to demons as the reason for moral deterioration, and the theory of Farhansyahto analyze hedonism as the effect of moral deterioration for British society in the Victorian era. This research finally underlined two major problems as the findings related to cause and effect in moral deterioration as seen on *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The cause is selling souls to the demons. The effect of moral deterioration is hedonism. Related to hedonism, the writer only found two kinds of problems; ethical hedonism and aesthetic hedonism.

Keywords: freedom, consciousness, possibility, facticity
I. INTRODUCTION

Moral cannot be separated from behaviors proposed by society and also accepted as a guideline of behavior for them. Moral values and behaviors are relevant to individuals, society, and the nation. Gert (2012) defined moral in the quotation below:

Moral as a set of conduct put forward by any actual group, including a society; and the normative definition which is based on the idea that what is moral should have a code of conduct that is put forward by a society and that it should be accepted as a guide to behaviour by the members of that society. (Gert, 2012, p. 3)

Gert’s definition of moral shows how morality claims human lives. As human beings living in the world, they have basic duties and obligations. There are certain things that they must do and certain things that must not do. Therefore, moral is values and behaviors proposed by individuals, communities, and nations and accepted as a code of conduct for themselves.

In understanding the context of a human relationship, Kohlberg (2004) also gave four main aspects related to the application of morality. First of all, is religious morality which is concerned with human beings in relationship to supernatural beings or beings. The second one is morality and nature that are concerned with human beings in relationship to nature. The third one is Individual morality which is concerned with human beings in relationship to themselves. And the last one is social morality which is concerned with human beings in relationship to other human beings.

Therefore, doing good or bad things in morality will result in human behavior itself. The more they are responsible and understand who they are, they will live and make the right choices for their life. In contrast, the more bad conduct that is put by any actual group, the more pain, unhappiness, and lack of excellence will lead them to disharmony and lack of creativity. This will also result from the reduced quality or strength of human behavior which is known as deterioration.

Deterioration is a symptom of reduced quality or strength (The Free Dictionary, 2005). It means that a process of changing to an inferior state. Therefore, moral deterioration can also be referred to as moral degradation/ decrease/ erosion and can be on the behavior associated with it. Muriel (2002) also points out that the failure of many people, especially youth; to incorporate moral values and a community ideal is an indicator of moral deterioration. In this study, moral deterioration will refer to the diminishing of moral values among...
individuals or groups of people in a given society.

This can be attributed to Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* which reflects moral deterioration. In this novel, moral deterioration is caused by human desire against religion. Human life is only temporary and has a limit to achieving life’s joy. There are many ways for a human to have a better life to get happiness. However, in this novel, Dorian Gray is the main character who is a handsome, innocent young man’s seduction, moral corruption, and eventual downfall. He is influenced by the hedonistic pleasures of the city. The image is captured in an enchanted painting that keeps him from aging. His portrait becomes tainted with every sin he commits, while he remains young and handsome. He indulges in every pleasure and virtually every sin, studying its effect upon him, which eventually leads to his death. He is the reflection of people in the Victorian Era who sell his soul and deal with demons to get eternal life and happiness. He believed that the perfection of life will never be achieved by the man who believes in God, because what the Gods give, they quickly take away.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In analyzing the data, the writer applies the theological approach that focuses on the concepts of natural law, obligation, freedom, conscience, and moral development in the novel. According to Meriam Webster's dictionaries (2018), theology is the study of religious faith, practice, and experience; especially the study of God and God’s relation to the world. It can be seen that the theological approach will help the writer to understand more about moral teaching that is conducted through human religious faith on God’s relation.

There are two theories used by the writer to analyze both of the research questions. Those are the theory of Ted Peters (1994) to analyze selling the soul to demons as the reason for moral deterioration, and the theory of Farhansyah (2018) to analyze hedonism as the effect of moral deterioration.

The reason why moral deterioration happened at the time is indicated by selling the soul to demons. Ted Peters (1994), a professor of systematic theology of the Pacific Lutheran Seminary, gave phenomenological ideas about development and how to understand the reality of the church that rejected God. One of Satan's fortunes is his success in building the kingdom of demons in the human world. Peter said that the phenomenon of sects worshiping Lucifer or evil spirits began to develop in the 1980s.
The first development in Satanism is the classic devil worship that developed in the 18th century in France. His trademark is the Eucharistic banquet to worship and present Satan. The second one is public demonism, initiated by Aleister Crowley (1875-1947) who introduced himself as a number statement “666” in the book of Revelation (13:18). Then Anton Szandor LaVey developed it and stated that 1966 was the year of Satan’s grace that invited people to worship him. The third is the volunteers are teenagers. They are generally fans of metal music in which there are elements of devil worship, drug abuse, and sexual deviations. They usually use a lot of Satan’s accessories and are involved in the sale of Satanic Bibles and the sale of Satanic Scriptures. The fourth is a series of murders involving certain lifestyles or spirits for life. Serial killings carried out by a person are usually related to the “spirituality” of self-excavated from certain verses of the Satanic Bible or teachings from their leaders. To reveal the teachings that have been embedded, it is not uncommon for them to have the heart to kill their servants, not even hesitate to commit suicide. This happens a lot in North America.

Another theory used by the writer here is Farhansyah’s theory (2018) about hedonism to analyze the effect of moral deterioration. Hedonism also has many divisions, but only two will be taken by the writer, which is Ethical Hedonism and Aesthetic Hedonism.

1. Ethical Hedonism

Unlike Ethical Hedonism, the point of view is about what is expressed/talk by an individual. For example, if someone claims to someone in a speech that what is said by the speaker is good and the person making the speech feels proud, then he is one of those who embrace Ethical Hedonism.

2. Aesthetic Hedonism

Approach/approach of aesthetic Hedonism is appearance, in the sense that one’s view of the person is good for him/herself in terms of physical empirical. What is meant by Aesthetic Hedonism is that a person will feel pleasure if he feels beautiful. If we find someone who feels proud that he is accused of being a good person, then that pride is considered as part of the enjoyment of aesthetic Hedonism.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

Qualitative research refers to the descriptions and classification without expressing feelings or judging. In addition, qualitative is what we see as it is without finding a detailed examination of the elements or structure of something, typically as a basis for discussion or interpretation (DeFranzo, 2011).

From the definition, this research applied qualitative research in observing
data that is supported with references to the specific topic or issues. In short, in collecting and presenting the data, the writer uses descriptive qualitative research. The data was collected in the form of words instead of numbers.

IV. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Selling the soul to demons

In this chapter, the writer focuses on the analysis of the moral deterioration of English society in the Victorian era. Those are selling souls and dealing with demons as long as it made the advantages for them. They believe that doing such a kind of spiritualism will help them to face the fast-changing world. On the other hand, many people cannot take advantage, and even they were influenced by negative effects. Human greed has finally caused British social life to turn into moral deterioration.

In the case of being greedy, people lose their faith if they feel more beliefs can change their life quickly. This is due to losing the inner side of humanity that has brought a longing to find something that is missing. That is what modern humans now experience.

According to Merriam Webster's online dictionary (2018), “selling soul is to gain wealth, success, power, etc., by doing something bad or dishonest.” From this quotation, it can be seen that selling the soul is known as an agreement with the devil. People offer their souls in return for evil help. It tends to include the soul of youth, knowledge, wealth, fame, or power. It is also believed that some people make this fact just as a sign of acknowledging the devil as their master. The man who makes the covenant sometimes tries to outwit the devil, but ultimately loses his own. A man sells his soul for eternal life so he will never die to pay the end of the bargain. It can be seen from the conversation between Lord Henry to Dorian Gray below:

“People are afraid of themselves, nowadays. They have forgotten the highest of all duties, the duty that one owes to one’s self. Of course, they are charitable. They feed the hungry and clothe the beggar. But their own souls starve, and are naked. Courage has gone out of our race. Perhaps we never really had it. The terror of society, which is the basis of morals, the terror of God, which is the secret of religion--these are the two things that govern us.” (Wilde, 1993, p. 16)

The quotation above is a conversation between Lord Henry, Basil Hallward, and Dorian Gray. They talk to each other in Lord Henry’s studio when basil Hallward will paint Dorian Gray’s face. They talk about Dorian’s simple and beautiful nature. Lord Henry tries to spoil Dorian with his bad influence. However, Basil always tries to block it.

The writer thinks that the bad
influence from Lord Henry is well-founded by Dorian Gray. This can be found in Lord Henry’s influence which explains the bitter reality that must be faced by humans in general. Therefore, he tries to affect Dorian not to let his perfect life go away. He persuades Dorian to be just like him who currently cannot maintain his majesty because of his old age. He assumes that present perfection will not be felt for the rest of his life. The beauty he has, cannot be fully felt because humans will die. This is the law of God and the moral teachings of religion where humans will day someday.

This limitation makes him think that immortality is impossible. Consequently, the absence of his belief in the heavenly things will give him the joy of eternal life. This statement is strengthened by the quotation below:

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 if it had been wine. He came close to him and put his hand upon his shoulder. "You are quite right to do that," he murmured. "Nothing can cure the soul but the senses, just as nothing can cure the senses but the soul." (Wilde, 1993, p. 18)

From the quotation above, Lord Henry talks to Dorian Gray. Dorian Gray wishes his face on the perfume in Lord Henry’s garden. He tries again to influence Dorian about the importance of eternity. He affects Dorian that only the soul can control the body. Nothing can damage the body if the soul can be owned and controlled. The soul is the essence of eternal life that can make life can be controlled and arranged according to his desires. The writer assumes that the stronger Lord Henry incites Dorian, the weaker of faith that Dorian has. The bad beliefs that Lord Henry had given him were even more powerful when Dorian also began to believe in the bitterness of life in the world.

Dorian Gray is incited by all of Lord Henry’s influence. He believes that his youth must be his mine forever and deny that no one is entitled to take it from him. He wants to have a right for what he has right now and does not depend on the power of God. His faith in God has gone when Lord Henry had influenced him. It can be seen between Dorian Gray and Basil’ dialogue below:

“I am jealous of everything whose beauty does not die. I am jealous of the portrait you have painted of me. Why should it keep what I must lose? Every moment that passes takes something from me and gives something to it. Oh, if it were only the other way! If the picture could change, and I could be always what I am now! Why did you paint it? It will mock me some day--mock me horribly!” (Wilde, 1993, p.
The writer assumes that the soul that has been existed within Dorian’s body is not completely able to rely on making their life eternal forever. He cannot feel his youth as his wish. He wants everything to be his mine; not bound by anything, or arranged by anyone. Lord Henry’s influence is the reflection of his passion which needs another person to also join in his beliefs. The beliefs are believed to make him enjoy life following his provisions. Living eternally by having the beauty of the eternal body is the dream of their life.

Besides that, the development of Satanism also goes when Dorian Gray kills his painter, Basil Hallward. This is a series of murders involving certain lifestyles or spirits for life. Peter (1994) said serial killings carried out by a person are usually related to the “spirituality” of self-excavated from certain verses of the Satanic Bible or teachings from their leaders. To reveal the teachings that have been embedded, it is not uncommon for them to have the heart to kill their servants, not even hesitate to commit suicide. This happens a lot in North America. It can be seen in the quotation below:

........suddenly an uncontrollable feeling of hatred for Basil Hallward came over him, as though it had been suggested to him by the image on the canvas, whispered into his ear by those grinning lips. (Wilde, 1993, p. 112)

This is the conversation between Dorian and Basil Hallward, the painter of Dorian’s face. This happened when Basil saw the hideous change in his beautiful portrait of Dorian. Basil Hallward is shocked. Dorian tells him too late for repentance, but Basil insists that it is never too late. Basil tells him that the accursed thing is leering to them. Dorian said he cannot be penitent because Dorian is not willing to try to reform and he has become morally corrupt. He kills Basil to not be exposed to society. Afterward, he tellshimself “not realize the situation.” The man who painted the “fatal portrait” is gone from his life “that was enough”.

In conclusion, because of the lack of human faith, they are easily influenced by temptation. The human desire to be someone influential in life, makes them blind to the path of truth when he does not underlie their desire for God. A desire which is not bounded by religious faith will lead to moral inequality. Therefore, humans will lead themselves to the bad deed to fulfill a sense of satisfaction and their eternal life quickly by selling their souls.

4.2 Hedonism

Hedonism is a view of life that considers that material pleasure and enjoyment are the main goals of life (Wikipedia, 2018). For adherents of this
understanding, having fun, partying, and passing away are the main goals of life, whether it's fun for others or not. Because they think life is only once, so they feel like enjoying life as enjoyable as possible. In this, the community of adherents, live on the road as freely as possible to fulfill unlimited passions. Therefore, concerning the theory, there are two kinds of hedonism that the writer found in the novel: ethical hedonism and aesthetic hedonism.

4.2.1 Ethical Hedonism

The Hedonists argue that the size of a life’s prosperity or not, the happiness of human life, can only be identified with material enjoyment. They want to fulfill their behavior to get pleasure. In this case, the writer concludes that a high selling value of people is hedonism because of whatever they will do to pursue these pleasures without any sense of despair.

According to Farhansyah (2018), Ethical Hedonism is about what is expressed or told by an individual. For example, if someone claims to someone in a speech that what is said by the speaker is good and the person making the speech feels proud, then he is one of those who embrace Ethical Hedonism. In this case, the hedonism in this novel tells about a selfish nobleman who wants to have the whole world in his grasp. Therefore, his desire to be God for himself has damaged his relationship with other humans and God. This is what makes a degradation of morals. Instead of doing something good for humanity, he prefers to turn to the dark deeds. Because of one’s incitement of glorifying the beauty of themselves, nothing seems to have any meaning for Dorian Gray except his beauty. This is the point of his transformation. This problem makes him impossible to create a satisfying relationship even appreciate what he has had in the past. The pleasure he got became a sin in which the concept of being able to sell his soul in a painting to keep looking young. Dorian uses sin as his ultimate goal to maintain durability. Physical form is not affected at all. This proves that his portrait shows fragility while his body remains young.

Hedonism becomes interesting for this discussion because the main characters in this novel are ordinary person who exists as the ideal person. He is the archetype of male youth and beauty becomes narcissism and beauty order. It can be seen in the quotation below:

“My dear boy, the people who love only once in their lives are really the shallow people. What they call their loyalty, and their fidelity, I call either the lethargy of custom or their lack of imagination.”

Related to the statement above, everlasting
love is nonsense for their beliefs. If indeed they can get love more than one or even have a lot of love why not do it. As a human being, he is free to determine how much love he can get without being bound by a legitimatemarriage in religious ties. It leads them to the hedonism that allows people to have much love. This shows that their hedonism contradicts the religious teaching at that time.

Based on the explanation above, one will do anything in various ways even though it is deviant only to achieve ultimate pleasure. This brings British society into moral deterioration because the way they got hedonism is contradicting religious teaching. Therefore, the greed of hedonism is empty since it leads to the decay of the soul. It is also supported by the quotation below:

“Humanity takes itself too seriously. It is the world’s original sin. If the caveman had known how to laugh, history would have been different.” (Wilde, 1993, p. 34)

Life can be changed in their way following their passions. However, many humans are bound by religious moral teachings that demand them a lot in living the wheel of life. They overestimate the long-taught path, and even though generations have confronted them already making them fearful or even unmoved to change their way of life and their dreams. The statement is already clear that the incitement of Lord Henry made a great impact on the person who has weak faith. Lord Henry is so reliable in changing the stance of the people around him to fall into bad things and even change their beliefs with what they consider working for them.

4.2.2 Aesthetic Hedonism

Utilizing human destiny in the world is the best way to change the mindset of the laity to sell their soul to demons. The devils can help them in maintaining the beauty and happiness of life forever. It can be supported by Farhansyah’s theory (2018) about Aesthetic Hedonism. He said that Aesthetic Hedonism is appearance, in the sense that one’s view of the person is good for him or herself in terms of physical empirical. What is meant by Aesthetic Hedonism is that a person will feel pleasure if they feel perfection in their lives. If we find someone who feels proud that he is accused of being a good person, then that pride is considered as part of the enjoyment of aesthetic Hedonism, as seen in this quotation:

Live! Live the wonderful life that is in you! Let nothing be lost upon you. Be always searching for new sensations. Be afraid of nothing... A new Hedonism-- that is what our century wants. You might be its visible symbol. With your personality there is nothing you
could not do. The world belongs to you for a season. The moment I met you I saw that you were quite unconscious of what you really are, of what you really might be. There was so much in you that charmed me that I felt I must tell you something about yourself. I thought how tragic it would be if you were wasted. (Wilde, 1993, p. 24)

The dialogue above reveals that eternal life does not depend on anyone except oneself. The perceived life of hedonism is one of the things that will be gained by its demons. By getting eternal life, they will no longer be afraid of anything including loss.

Moreover, Lord Henry wants to convince Dorian Gray of human foolishness who does not realize that they can do anything as long as they want to do it, as seen in the statement below:

anybody can be good in the country. There are no temptations there. That is the reason why people who live out of town are so absolutely uncivilized. Civilization is not by any means an easy thing to attain to. There are only two ways by which man can reach it. One is by being cultured, the other by being corrupt. Country people have no opportunity of being either, so they stagnate.

The writer thinks that there are no people who will find a good result except for his or her defense. Therefore, Lord Henry persuades Dorian Gray to keep his mission to deal with the dark deeds.

As far as spirituality is concerned, Lord Henry manages to bring Dorian Gray to a bad state. His belief in demons and his desire to sell his soul to demons reflects the moral deterioration faced by the British people. The Victorian Age that includes many supernatural things such as believing in the popularity of spirits and photography have a bad impact on religious beliefs. Moral teachings of religion began to be threatened even religious ideas changed drastically. Therefore, the religious crisis can be seen clearly from the causes above.

Therefore, when humans have felt the easiness and pleasure, they will automatically want to try it again until they feel satisfied. However, they are not aware of the bad things that will have a big impact on them. Constant pleasure and immortality are gained from the devil will make them a victim. Finally, their deviant beliefs lead them to moral deterioration. The impact of that leads them to hedonism and makes demons to be their God.

In conclusion, hedonism has undergone a shift of meaning to the understanding of society which becomes a concept that is only oriented to the material. Hedonism is a form of understanding theory that is oriented to pleasure. Because the orientation is the pleasure, the hedonists will stay away automatically from everything that limits their enjoyment. But
in line with the causal law, the existence of hedonism is not possible earlier than the effort of obtaining pleasure. The result of this hedonism’s attitude leads to its adherents to worldly things. No matter how bad they maintain their dedication, this is not morally valuable.

V. CONCLUSION

The writer has studied The Picture of Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde. After reading and analyzing the novel, the writer found that there are two main problems faced by Dorian Gray as the reflection of British people in the Victorian era. The first is selling the soul to demons as the reason for moral deterioration, and the second one is hedonism as the effect of moral deterioration. For someone who does not have strong faith, all of the ways will be taken to get the things that cannot be obtained by others. One of those things is the eternity of life. In the context of hedonism, this attitude leads to its adherents to worldly things. No matter how bad they maintain their dedication, this is not morally valuable.

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