

The Picture of Dorian Gray and the character construction on screen

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Abstract

This paper is an analysis of the construction of Dorian Gray, from the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (2004), by Oscar Wilde, making a parallel with the same character from the TV show *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016), by John Logan. After briefly explaining the main points of Aestheticism, we will focus on the construction of some narrative events that occur in Dorian Gray's life, as well as to the observation of its representation on the television screen, seeking to understand some changes. As theoretical background, we use authors who deal with themes of literature and adaptation, such as Robert Stam (2006), Décio Torres Cruz (2014), Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan (2010). We start from the point that *Penny Dreadful* is a literary collage, and that particular traits of construction of both characters emphasize their differences, creating new motivations for the narrative development in the process of adaptation from the book to television.

Keywords

Dorian Gray. Oscar Wilde. *Penny Dreadful*.

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Introduction

Literary works are a fundamental part of the world's general culture. Each part of the earth has its own literature and every single piece of it has its enormous value, as the 1774 novel, *The sorrows of young Werther*, by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), that created a deadly effect over the young lovers from the 18th century Germany. So, Literature as such is more than mere entertainment. As Candido (2004) has reinforced, Literature is a construction of ideas full of meanings:

I will name literature in the larger possible way every creation that is poetic, fictional or dramatic at every level of a society, every kind of culture, from what we call folklore, tale, joke, to the most complex and difficult ways of written production from the great civilizations.⁵⁹ (CANDIDO, 2004, p. 174).

For this author, the structure of Literature comprehends every creation that is poetic, fictional or dramatic from the most difficult forms to the simple ones. Candido (2004) goes further and elucidates that all human beings should have access to literature. Candido (2004), then, claims that literature is a fundamental right as any other, and that no matter the amount of money people have, they must have literature in their lives as well: “The literary productions of all kinds and levels satisfy basic human needs, and through this incorporation that enhances our perception and vision of the world”⁶⁰ (CANDIDO, 2004, 179). All the social conditions have to be fulfilled with this shot of poetic writings.

Zilberman (2012) bounds the object of literature as oral and written productions, making clear that not everything metaphorical, poetical, or fictional can necessarily be considered literature. Concerning what the author says: “The specification of the object of Literary theory has then to take a position on issues related to writing and

⁵⁹The translations into English presented throughout the text are mine: “Chamarei de literatura, da maneira mais ampla possível, todas as criações de toque poético, ficcional ou dramático em todos os níveis de uma sociedade, em todos os tipos de cultura, desde o que chamamos folclore, lenda, chiste, até as formas mais complexas e difíceis da produção escrita das grandes civilizações.” (CANDIDO, 2004, p. 174).

⁶⁰ “As produções literárias, de todos os tipos e todos os níveis, satisfazem necessidades básicas do ser humano, sobretudo através dessa incorporação, que enriquece a nossa percepção e a nossa visão do mundo.” (CANDIDO, 2004, p. 179).

orality just as on reading and hearing of texts and poems”⁶¹ (ZILBERMAN, 2012, p. 12). The object of literature is delimited, nonetheless, as Tzvetan Todorov (2006) talks about the literary instruments. Using language is a common question in Todorov’s work as he mentions in *As estruturas narrativas*⁶² (2006) how connected language and literature are. For him, language is the instrument used for literary productions: “The language is defined as the matter of the poet or of the work”⁶³ (TODOROV, 2006, p. 54). Being acquainted with the limits and the instruments used for literature and its importance, what would be Comparative Literature? Carvalhal (2006, p. 6) says:

And the meaning of the expression “comparative literature” is complicated even more when it is known that there is not only one orientation to be followed, and many times a methodological eclecticism is used. In more recent studies we see that the method (or methods) does not come before the analysis, like something previously formulated, but it follows from it. It gradually becomes clearer that comparative literature can not be understood simply as a synonym for “comparison”. First of all because this is not an exclusive resource of the comparativist. On the other hand, comparison is not a specific method, but a mental procedure that supports generalization or differentiation⁶⁴.

Given that the means of comparing and analyzing literature are diverse and that they do not follow only a specific method, I chose to compare a character from a book written in 1890 with one from a totally distinct form of production, with its construction for a TV show.

Penny Dreadful (2014-2016) has a particular narrative construction. It is not a filmic adaptation, although its episodes are very different from the ones of other famous TV shows such as *How I Met Your Mother* (2005-2014) and *Gilmore Girls* (2000-2007). The episodes we watch in *Penny Dreadful* are in a category that is normally called classic serial, and it is from Showtime Inc, a British company that works with radio and TV. The British TV companies had this idea of teaching their audience about their own culture, as

⁶¹ “A especificação do objeto da Teoria da Literatura tem, portanto, de se posicionar perante as questões relativas à escrita e à oralidade, assim como perante a leitura e a audição de textos e poemas.” (ZILBERMAN, 2012, p. 12).

⁶² *Pour une Theorie du Recit* (TODOROV, 2006).

⁶³ “A linguagem é aí definida como a matéria do poeta ou da obra” (TODOROV, 2006, p. 54).

⁶⁴ “E o sentido da expressão “literatura comparada” complica-se ainda mais ao constatarmos que não existe apenas uma orientação a ser seguida, que, por vezes, é adotado um certo ecletismo metodológico. Em estudos mais recentes, vemos que o método (ou métodos) não antecede à análise, como algo previamente fabricado, mas dela decorre. Aos poucos torna-se mais claro que literatura comparada não pode ser entendida apenas como sinônimo de “comparação”. Antes de tudo, porque esse não é um recurso exclusivo do comparativista. Por outro lado, a comparação não é um método específico, mas um procedimento mental que favorece a generalização ou a diferenciação” (CARVALHAL, 2006, p. 6).

reinforced by Cardwell: “Until the mid 1990s, there was also a strong proclivity for British classic novels, reflecting the prevailing notion of ‘educating and informing’ the public about British cultural heritage” (CARDWELL, 2010, p. 183). *Penny Dreadful* is indeed a series full of Literature, since its characters are from Mary Shelley and Oscar Wilde’s books, with the exception that the new context, the time in which it was produced, must be taken into account.

The Picture of Dorian Gray had complex issues such as assassination, hypocrisy among citizens from the writer’s society, the use of drugs and a strange admiration from a man to another. The years passed by and Dorian Gray remains a very interesting character. Thereupon, the present research aims to bare what was the Aesthetic movement, Wilde’s Aesthetic style of work, and what was happening in the 19th century while Queen Victoria was the queen in England. After getting familiar with some context from the time the book was written, I will be point out some incidents in Dorian Gray’s life that helped him change. Then, the present paper drives the attention to Dorian from the TV show, taking into account some similarities and some differences in his construction in the book and the TV show, along with a brief theoretical background on TV adaptations and the case of this one in particular.

1 The Aesthetic Movement

The Aesthetic movement started in the 19th century, and Oscar Wilde is a great name to represent it. The ideas of this movement could be seen, not only through literature, but also through other manifestations of art as paintings, interior designs, clothing, and this is what The Art History website⁶⁵ says in its section “The Aesthetic Movement”. The artists who made use of the styles had a purpose only with art, in addition to that the movement is also known as “art for art’s sake” (GUAN, 2018, p. 25), and the main intention of the artists when creating their pieces of art concerned about beauty. The artistic tendency of the 19th century was a type of reaction to society from that time given that people were so concerned about good behaviors including morality. Before Aestheticism, the time was surrounded by people who believed that art should exist to teach a lesson (JEFFREY, 2016, p.1)⁶⁶, and when artists from all types emphasized through their arts that art could only be beautiful, it moved the public that was governed by conservative values of Queen Victoria’s government.

⁶⁵ Available at: <https://www.theartstory.org/movement/aesthetic-art/>.

⁶⁶ Dr. Rebecca Jeffrey Easby on Smart History: the center for public art history.

1.1 *The Aestheticism in Wilde's works*

The Picture of Dorian Gray is a work that is part of the Aestheticism period, the hedonism in the book is one characteristic. However, it is not the only work by Wilde that fits into the movement, other works, such as the narratives *The Nightingale and the Rose* (1888), *The Happy Prince* (1888), the play *The Importance of Being Earnest* (2021) also have characteristics of the aesthetic movement.

In his works, it did not matter what he had to write to create beauty, and this might clarify our minds concerning the understanding of the real motive, his works are the way they are. To Wilde, beauty can also be found in the ugly actions, as in death and this is a crucial aspect to understand the creation of a character as Dorian Gray.

However, Dorian is not Wilde's unique unfortunate character. In the play *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Jack is also a type of an unlucky person as the play criticizes in a very subtle way the traditions of that time in which Wilde lived, for instance, the social conditions of Jack's origin and how this issue could be an obstacle to his wedding with Gwendolen:

LADY BRACKNELL.

To lose one parent, Mr. Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness. Who was your father? He was evidently a man of some wealth. Was he born in what the Radical papers call the purple of commerce, or did he rise from the ranks of the aristocracy? (WILDE, 2021, Act I, p. 13).

In fact, this could be a very unpleasant topic to be shown in a comedy play and by this excerpt we can see how Lady Bracknell is worried about his social status. By doing so, Wilde made a very comic play that leads us to recognize the words art for art's sake as being capable of doing art without directly discussing what is wrong or right in society.

Right in the Preface of his book, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde emphasizes his Aestheticism: "There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all" (WILDE, 2004, p. 5). Again, this excerpt from the beginning of the work fits the story of Dorian himself and self-explanatory of the concept of how Aestheticism works. When *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was published, Wilde was criticized (FLOOD, 2009, p. 1). This fact reflects a hypocritical society that cannot stand to see a man going to places in which people with "good morality" should not go. When the time passes and Dorian remains unchangeable people

start to comment about him, and these same people continue to go out with this monstrous Dorian. He was surrounded by people who pointed out his sins, but they did not look at their own, as shown below:

You ask me why Berwick leaves a room when I enter it. It is because I know everything about his life, not because he knows anything about mine. With such blood as he has in his veins, how could his record be clean? You ask me about Henry Ashton and young Perth. Did I teach the one his vices, and the other his debauchery? (...) (WILDE, 2004, p. 105)

There is no such thing as immoral or moral in Dorian's story, even so, some of his actions are undoubtedly terrifying; the young man is there not to die for the desire to do something, he is there to do what he wants to do and to exercise his perfect hedonistic way.

1.2 The 19th century in Europe

Conservative perceptions on some issues are still observed in every society we know. Even with the development of social movements over the last decades, in the present, we see that some groups as queer people are treated as something different from the "normal". Naturally, during the 1800s this aspect was not different, in fact, it was even worse. Queen Victoria was the leader of a people who would be obsessed about the clothing, the morality, the good actions, the society of good customs was more interested in looking fine than having any consideration about the poor ones.

By discussing the conservative perspective of the Victorian society, Jane Horsfield (2020) elicits that this time of the Victorian people's lives, the curiosity of trying to find out and discover more about their own sexuality increased, and she claims that "it was during this period that the words 'homosexual' and 'lesbian' were first used" (HORSFIELD, 2020, p. 22). All of these new ideas and the aesthete's urge to create an explicit piece of art would be against the ideas of Queen Victoria and Christianity.

The time has passed and nowadays things have changed a little bit concerning some of the taboos from the 19th century, for example, a same-sex marriage is acceptable in countries like Brazil, Canada, Mexico, United States of America, Sweden, Norway,

Finland, etc⁶⁷. However, having a same-sex marriage acceptable by the justice does not mean things are perfect, we are not even close to the ideal society. In Brazil, according to Dias (2022, p. 1), 300 hundred people were killed violently, during 2021, in crimes of homophobia.

During the 19th century, the life of the LGBTQIA+ community was worse than it is nowadays. As reported by Breijão and Benvenuto (2015), violence against gays, lesbians, trans people or any other member from the LGBTQIA+ community has its origins in a model of family that was formed by a man and a woman, so, every type of relationship that was different from this was seen as wrong. Diverse terms were used to refer to queer people, and under Breijão and Benvenuto's (2015) view, Maria Gabriela Martins de Nóbrega Moita says that:

(...) the term sodomite and its practices were attributed with diverse meanings. Every sexual act which deviated from heterosexual intercourse (the oral or anal sexual acts among men or among men and women), masturbation, pull out method, zoophilia, sexual intercourse in a position other than that in which the man stood on top (understanding that the chances of conception are reduced) was reproved (BREIJÃO; BENVENUTO, 2015, p. 55).⁶⁸

Being assimilated to a practitioner of zoophilia shows the huge discrimination queer people suffered. In this context, Victorian society could not accept gay couples, especially if the gay couple was the son of a Marquess and an important writer and then, the trial began in court. According to Western Mail, under the perspective of Rose Staveley-Wadham⁶⁹, “Wilde had not fled, nor even attempted to do so” (STAVELEY-WADHAM, 2020, p. 1), but he lost and it was a shock to him. In jail, alone and doing works he had never had to do in life, Wilde could not fit into the prison life. His lover, Lord Alfred had also forgotten him. He started to live as if he had no wife, no kids, and lost his prestige as a famous playwright. He was suffering mentally and physically, since he suffered accidents in prisons that cost him serious problems with his ear and sadly hastened his death in 1900 of meningitis. A tragic end to an author who had once been

⁶⁷ Council on Foreign Relations website data. Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/marriage-equality-global-comparisons>

⁶⁸ (...) ao termo sodomia e as suas práticas foram atribuídos diversos significados. Todo ato sexual que desviasse da cópula heterossexual (os atos sexuais orais ou anais, entre homens ou entre homens e mulheres), masturbação, coito interrompido, zoofilia, relação sexual heterossexual em outra posição que não fosse o homem sobre a mulher (entendendo que diminui as chances de concepção) era reprovado (BREIJÃO; BENVENUTO, 2015, p. 55).

⁶⁹ Writer in The British Newspaper Archive. Available at: <https://blog.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/2020/06/09/trial-of-oscar-wilde/>

celebrated and invited to different parties among his high class friends had become an unimportant person, a victim of society.

2 Dorian Gray's construction in the literary narrative

P. D. Cummins produced an adaptation of *Great Expectations*, by Charles Dickens, and said that "Alterations were necessary in order to make the story clear, but all concerned in the serial have done everything possible to keep it faithful to the spirit of Dickens, so we do most sincerely hope it will live up to your expectations" (GIDDINGS; SELBY, 2001, p. 20).

Throughout the narrative of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, we can perceive a young Dorian who is naive and who does not know how life can be lived. He has Basil and Lord Henry as his main friends and Basil could be classified as a good friend of Dorian, and Harry as a bad friend.

When Lord Henry first meets Dorian, he puts some ideas on Dorian's mind that the boy had never thought about. What comes next in Lord Henry's speeches frightens Basil's model and he describes what future awaits for Dorian Gray:

"Because you have the most marvellous youth, and youth is the one thing worth having."

"I don't feel that, Lord Henry."

"No, you don't feel it now. Some day, when you are old and wrinkled and ugly, when thought has seared your forehead with its lines, and passion branded your lips with its hideous fires, you will feel it, you will feel it terribly. Now, wherever you go, you charm the world. Will it always be so? (...) (WILDE, 2004, p. 20).

The intensity of his words in telling Dorian how beauty is the only worthwhile thing in life definitely changed the youngest boy's perception of the world. We may take into consideration that Harry works as a type of poison to Dorian Gray.

Dorian is so obsessed of how youth is everything a person has, he even cogitates to kill himself when he started getting old: "When I find that I am growing old, I shall kill myself." (WILDE, 2004, p. 23). A man in his 20 years old cries because he is scared of being ugly. It reminds us of the Greek myth of the handsome Narcissus who could only love himself and was cursed by Aphrodite taking him to death.

Until the moment Dorian Gray meets Sibyl Vane, Lord Kelso's grandson sincerely speaks about how divided he is about following Harry's ideas or following the love that is consuming himself. Perhaps if Dorian had never met Harry, but only Sibyl

Vane, things could have happened differently. After meeting Sibyl and facing a mediocre actress, Dorian acts terribly against her. This is a very important moment in the narrative of the book, because from the exceptionally bad representation of Sibyl on stage, she loses all her credit of being a good artist for only one night and Dorian does not forgive her and blames her, leaving her destroyed with a broken heart.

After being cruel and understanding that his crazy desire, made on the day Mr. Hallward finished his painting, of being forever young instead of his picture was accomplished, Dorian is kind of lost, and since this is way beyond his comprehension, he decides to go back to the errors he had committed, because he was shocked and could not imagine that he had been cruel to someone. Although he knew he had been cruel, he could not accept at all living with that fact of having a wicked mark on his face.

So, the next morning, Dorian starts to feel concerned about going back to Sibyl and apologizes for every insult he had said to her. However, he never has the chance to do it, because she had killed herself the previous night. His remorse soon disappears with a simple conversation with Lord Henry and turns itself into a delightful emotion: “It has been a marvellous experience. That is all. I wonder if life has still in store for me anything as marvellous” (WILDE, 2004, p. 75). Then, out of nothing, he forgets how he was feeling when he saw the cruelty mark on his painting. This tragedy functioned to bring Dorian even closer to Lord Henry.

So, Dorian Gray followed his life hiding the picture that had his secret, from everybody. At 38 years old, Dorian kept his beauty and his angelic features. People used to talk about him and his oldest friends started to be concerned, for instance, Basil Hallward:

“Why is it, Dorian, that a man like the Duke of Berwick leaves the room of a club when you enter it? Why is it that so many gentlemen in London will neither go to your house or invite you to theirs? You used to be a friend of Lord Staveley. (...) (WILDE, 2004, p. 105).

Although he knew through people from society what things Dorian Gray used to do, Mr. Hallward did not believe them, he preferred to believe in his friend, Dorian, except that the young Dorian who went to Basil’s studio to model to him did not exist anymore. And Dorian commits a crime: he murders his friend Basil Hallward. At this point, Dorian is possessed by sarcasm and instability: “There was the madness of pride in every word he uttered. He stamped his foot upon the ground in his boyish insolent manner. He felt a terrible joy at the thought that some one else was to share his secret”

(WILDE, 2004, p. 106). If Dorian's soul is in the portrait, then, we shall agree that he has a bad soul.

One more special event in Dorian Gray's story is when he decides to be good and poses against Lord Henry's ideas for the first time in years. After doing a good action, as Dorian called it, he comprehends that it will not matter if from that point in his life he only does good things, the portrait will remain unchanged. This rupture with Harry leads to Dorian's ending because Harry has had for so many years a great influence over Dorian Gray's life and then, when this man decides to be good, things in the atmosphere change: "Do stay. You have never played so well as tonight. There was something in your touch that was wonderful. It had more expression than I had ever heard from it before.' 'It is because I am going to be good'" (WILDE, 2004, p.152). This special change was merely to feel feelings as he has done for so long: "Through vanity he had spared her. In hypocrisy he had worn the mask of goodness. For curiosity's sake he had tried the denial of self. He recognized that now" (WILDE, 2004, p. 155).

3 Dorian Gray's construction in the TV series Penny Dreadful

The story of *Penny Dreadful* is set in a universe from Victorian London, a time in which the serial killer famously known as *Jack, the ripper* lived and killed his victims mutilating their bodies. According to Finlay⁷⁰ (2019), not only the slaughter by the ripper(s) astonished London at that time, but also other crimes, since society was living a wave of violence with robberies, prostitution and abusive use of opium.

The TV show represents exactly this atmosphere from that time: the streets are dirty and full with people that are also dirty and hungry, reinforcing that crime rates were indeed high due to the people's conditions of life.

The moment Dorian Gray (Reeve Carney) first appears in the narrative is in the episode Séance, and differently from the book, spectators met this young and handsome man doing something that Dorian in chapter one from the book would not do. In the TV series, spectators have the first contact with Dorian already in his hedonistic essence, living his life to the fullest.

In his debut scene, Dorian is tediously watching Mr. Frawley, a photographer, photographing a lady, Brona Croft. What draws Dorian Gray's attention is the moment

⁷⁰ Available at: <https://crimereads.com/the-victorian-underworlds-most-unusual-crimes/>.

Brona coughs blood. This makes Dorian stand up and go towards her. His face changes abruptly: "I've never fucked a dying creature before" (LOGAN, 2014), says Dorian to Miss Croft after her blood particles had jumped out of her mouth. This situation may indicate the difference in both stories, Dorian from the TV is shown through fatigued expressions as a formed man that seemingly had already experienced everything in life, and that is why he is looking for new experiences. Associating that as a strategy of adaptation, we can link to what Stam (2006) had discussed as an aspect of transtextuality that might be cataloged by Gerard Genette, under Stam's perspective, as hypertextuality in which the TV show modifies, adds and removes aspects from its hypotext, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (2004).

There is a moment on episode four from season one, Demimonde, where Dorian talks about the duality of things:

DORIAN: What I find so fascinating about flowers is their duplicity.

VANESSA: Duplicity?

DORIAN: Well, their hidden depths, at any rate. Here, look at this.

VANESSA: Mmm, it's beautiful. (...)

(LOGAN, 2014).

His enchantment for the duplicity of flowers that are beautiful but some are very dangerous can be seen as a moment of the character playing with himself: Dorian is physically irresistible but dangerous and he knows it. In his debut episode, it is shown that Dorian fascinates everyone who meets him just as it happens in the book: "How fascinating the lad was!" (WILDE, 2004, p. 18). In the audiovisual translation, people start staring at Dorian and are susceptible to accept anything he asks for, evidencing the same theme of youth and beauty from the book.

As it was mentioned above, the character seems to be ready for something new, and orgies are outdated for him as we can see in Demimonde in which Dorian Gray watches people having sex, but not participating himself. It is not only sex that feeds his soul, but also the idea of being in criminal places to watch dogs fighting against rats.

Nevertheless, in season two it is clarified how people judge him for the fact of his interaction with a transgender woman, Angelique. Being the adaptation simply one more text among many other texts, according to the narratology, Stam (2006) emphasizes

that “(...) human beings use the stories as their main way to make things have a purpose”⁷¹ (p. 24), so, the use of a transgender woman and the angry eyes of the Victorian citizens to Dorian and Angelique while they seem to be a couple in the TV series may be seen as a way to tell the public what a “protein/multiform narrative” is⁷². In other words, a story from real life, because transgender women are real and very barely understood by society. So, being the gender questions more commented in the 2000s, the TV show brings to Dorian a particular characteristic to discuss a contemporary problem: transphobia.

Everything can change in an adaptation and different reinterpretations can be done, especially if it has a specific purpose, and this is what Stam (2006) says about the freedom the owner of adaptations has. When Dorian gets into a relationship with Angelique, he even throws a ball so he can make her debut to his friends. Dorian agrees with her taking some clothes to his big and fancy house. He was very apt to love her. The issue of transphobia is not the main plot of Dorian and Angelique’s development, in fact, the struggle that leads to Angelique’s ruin is Dorian’s infidelity.

We can say that the introduction to someone explicitly queer in Dorian’s narrative arc in the TV series is memorable and very divergent from what Stam (2006, p. 45) calls purification of the moral topics of social life, and undoubtedly the audience of the audiovisual text will think about it and perceive that the main characters did not judge Angelique, but welcomed her making her feel confident in what concerns her gender, making the audience question themselves if this is really something that matters to the story.

4 The adaptation for small screen

When TV shows started to be made, from the mobility in studio as to record a scene to the mobility of the actors and actresses themselves, it created an aura of the shooting, “the limited movement of characters meant that the actors were restricted to moving with a demarcated area, contributing to a ‘stagy’ feel” (p.185). This started to happen during the year of 1937, and some technological advances were only added to serial dramas during the 70’s Cardwell (2007) indicated: “while some television programs fruitfully exploited later advances in technology that provided the opportunity for

⁷¹ “[...] os seres humanos usam as histórias como sua principal forma de fazer sentido das coisas” (STAM, 2006, p. 24).

⁷² A narrativa é protéica assumindo uma variedade de formas, das narrativas pessoais da vida quotidiana até as miríades de formas de narrativas pública. (STAM, 2006, p. 24. Translated by me).

innovation, classic-novel adaptations conventionalized many of these early aesthetic traits and one can find them in adaptations up to and into the 1970s” (p.185).

Still talking about the 1970’s, the big concern on adapting something was doing it precisely being very faithful to its main source: “many adaptors chose to persist with well-established televisual practices, retaining as many as possible of the words of the source text, reproducing dialogue and translating some descriptive passages into spoken words” (CARDWELL, p.186).

As the studies of Cardwell (2007, p. 187) provides information, the Reithian purpose was the one with ideas of informing, educating and entertaining its audience. Hence, the public service broadcasting was concerned on leasing some programs that had some importance on people’s education and “adaptations were seen as a perfect way to achieve all these aims, bringing great literature to the public (CARDWELL, p.188).

The time has passed and all of these works on TV shows contributed a lot to the present TV series that are nowadays streaming on social online platforms or being recorded for TV. These past TV shows have an important legacy and of course they might be used as an inspiration, but a lot has changed through the years and the directors conduct their episodes differently from that time. In the early days of production the touching was about faithfulness but we see that now in studies, such as Stam’s (2006), the questions that should be raised are why a certain adaptation was done the way it was?

Beneath the studies of Mirenayat and Soofastaei (2015), Gerard Genette’s first concept is about the references about previous knowledge, named intertextuality. It is a relation existent between, at least, two texts. It does not matter whether it is oral or written. Still following the last author’s studies, Genette’s second transtextuality type is the paratextuality remaining the relation existent between a text and its paratext, being this one a title, a preface, an illustration, or anything else that is written next to the text. Genette’s third type of transtextuality is metatextuality, which revolves around the aspects of criticism on a certain work as explained by Mirenayat and Soofastaei (2015). The authors explains that the fourth type, called architextuality is a relation existent between a genre and a text written in the modes of that genre, Stam (2006) complements when talking about architextuality, he says that cases in which a movie did not did not present itself as an adaptation from a determined source, it is when architextuality happens.

The whole universe of *Penny Dreadful* is a great reverence to poetry and literary features. The title of the show itself refers to a time in the past when people used to buy stories about criminality or supernatural entities in the 19th century as claimed by Hephzibah Anderson (2016)⁷³. The price of these stories was not high, and the people from Victorian society felt embraced, they bought a lot of them.

Also known for their various different names such as: “penny awfuls, penny horribles and penny bloods” (ANDERSON, 2016, p. 1), the penny dreadfuls were an immersive experience into real crimes or fictional crimes as well. The themes were very gore and there were some drawings on the penny dreadfuls. As evidence for that, the first episode on season one is very grotesque as well, it starts with the werewolf (later discovered as being Ethan Chandler devouring a daughter’s mother).

In the third episode, the character of Victor Frankenstein sees his dog dead and comments with his mom a sentence from an unnamed poet: “When the poets write of death, it’s invariably serene” (LOGAN, 2014). A few hours later, his mom starts to throw up blood over him, which takes the scene to Victor looking disappointed at his sick mom from a certain distance and telling a man next to him that “Death is not serene”. This whole atmosphere of the scene creates a poetic image. His reality had shown him that things can be different from what authors write and that they will not always be right. This shocking event in Victor’s life makes the boy express no sadness at his mom’s funeral.

What comes next is the terrible death of one of Frankenstein’s creatures, Proteus. Victor’s first creature has returned and he has a broken heart by his creator, and that is why he kills Victor’s newest creature. The lines of his speech can be read as a synesthesia, because while he speaks, he terrifies his creator who is on the floor afraid of him, as he says: “I would seek you even unto the maelstrom of the blackest tempest of the darkest night” (LOGAN, 2014). As observed, he uses hyperbole to build up the spectator’s feeling of anxiety about what to expect next or to think if his first creature will kill his creator. The whole scene between Frankenstein and his first creature is full of figures of speech such as irony; literary devices are totally present in the scene.

The use of poetic language in *Penny Dreadful* is not new in adaptation, “certain directors utilize poetry and poetic language in their films, and some of them are

⁷³ Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20160502-the-shocking-tale-of-the-penny-dreadful>

considered poets in their use of the camera; the way they describe and provoke emotions and feelings in the viewer through photography acquires poetical function” (CRUZ, 2014, p. 50). Although Cruz (2014) studied the poetry presented in the adaptation of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), by Philip K. Dick, the concept of creating a poetic image with cameras can be applied in TV series as well, but in terms of methodology it would be necessary to do episode per episode.

Conclusion

In this brief analysis, we have seen some characteristics of the Aestheticism, especially because it is important to understand a little about the complexity of Oscar Wilde’s writings. The author wrote works during Queen Victoria reign, a moment in history that non-hegemonic sexual orientations, such as gay and lesbians relationships and transgender people were not acceptable at all. We have seen the tragic life of Wilde and how his works were intense.

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the object of study for this paper, a very provocative story is presented to us as readers, with behaviors from the time it was written. Dorian has a privileged life and it is possible for us to understand the movements that took him to his end, through the narrative construction, which is different from the character construction for TV. Another writer is necessary for the creation of this audiovisual Dorian, in this case, for *Penny Dreadful*, for the reason that not everything from the book would be possible to be represented on screen.

The theoretical background to support the analysis used authors such as Robert Stam (2006) that talks about the points the students should pay attention to when researching adaptation. Although this author uses movies as his object of study, it is reasonable to adapt his criteria for TV. The author also talks about adaptations and how they should never be a copy, in fact, adaptations do not need to be a copy due to the new interpretation of the director, because readers, as it is often the case, will adapt their own interpretations of what they had read.

The changes in Dorian for the small screen cannot be seen as negative, in actual fact, the character is handsome as we could imagine Dorian from the book and very intelligent, persuasive, dangerous and thirsty for life as Wilde’s Dorian Gray. The biggest difference is in the focus on showing Dorian being played in his best days of youth, after he learned how to live his life, and we are not able to see his growth through the TV show,

as we were able to read in the book. So, Dorian from the TV gives emphasis to his own subjectivity construction in a short period of his life. Another specific aspect of the audiovisual text is the addition of different characters in his surrounding, as the case of Angelique, the transgender character. As presented in the text, the study of Breijão and Benvenuto (2015) showed that during the Victorian Era the conception of normality was only attributed to heterosexual couples, and according to these researchers, getting caught having any sexual act that would not serve to procreate could lead the practitioners to serious penalties, such as, drowning, impalement, property confiscation, among others (BREIJÃO; BENVENUTO, 2015, p. 57). Since the focus of the TV show is not on Angelique's relationship with Dorian Gray, none of this happened to them, which configures one more difference, afterwards, the reality of LGBTQIA+ members was very different from what Angelique had with Dorian.

From Mirenayat and Soofastaei's (2015) perspective, Gerard Genette elicits the types of transtextuality, and it is obtainable in many aspects of the TV show. Besides the changes known, and their classification according to Genette's five types of transtextuality: intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, architextuality, and hypertextuality, in this text a brief historical overview of TV and the adaptations through the years were also presented.

Cinema and TV shows were never the same, both have their differences and of course, they are quite similar due to the idea of having actors representing on a screen. Cinema exists before TV shows, and the process for this last one to happen was quite slow, though nowadays there are thousands of TV shows, and indubitably, the advance of technology is a good reason for that, but at the very beginning, the classical serials were the most requested ones for teaching above entertainment. *Penny Dreadful* is certainly an audiovisual product full of cultural aspects, since it brings characters as Dorian Gray, Dr. Frankenstein, demons, prostitutes, witches, among others, making a dialogue with elements of the tradition.

All of these characters could be a reason to certainly state that the TV show can be analyzed as a literary collage. Despite its characters, its method of being produced represents a collection of diverse elements from canonical literary texts, as it is the case of the figures of speech very present throughout the two seasons analyzed in this paper.

In conclusion, we can say that *Penny Dreadful* is not similar to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* concerning all the story, which is not as the TV show presents itself. The

audiovisual narrative is not centered in Dorian's life, on the contrary, he is a supporting character. And besides this piece of information, the character construction on TV with all its changes achieves Dorian's hedonistic traits.

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O RETRATO DE DORIAN GRAY E A CONSTRUÇÃO DO PERSONAGEM NA TELA

Resumo

Este artigo analisa a construção de Dorian Gray, a partir de *O Retrato de Dorian Gray* (2004), de Oscar Wilde, fazendo um paralelo com o mesmo personagem do seriado *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016), de John Logan. Após explicarmos brevemente os principais pontos do Esteticismo, focalizamos na construção de alguns acontecimentos narrativos que ocorrem na vida de Dorian Gray, bem na observação de sua representação nas telas, buscando compreender algumas mudanças. Como embasamento teórico, utilizamos autores que tratam de questões sobre literatura e adaptação, como Robert Stam (2006), Décio Torres Cruz (2014), Deborah Cartmell e Imelda Whelehan (2010). Partimos da ideia de que *Penny Dreadful* é uma colagem literária, e que traços particulares da construção dos dois personagens enfatizam suas diferenças, criando novas motivações para o desenvolvimento narrativo no processo de adaptação do livro para a televisão.

Palavras-chave

Dorian Gray. Oscar Wilde. *Penny Dreadful*.