

Article

On the Rejection of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by W. H. Smith

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Abstract: Wilde's only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, is widely said to have been rejected by W. H. Smith, but there is no doubt that this did not happen. The letter sent to Wilde by the publisher strongly indicates that W. H. Smith contemplated removing the July issue of *Lippincott's Magazine*, but does not go so far as to say that the bookstore did. This letter is the only evidence, however, that this is not absolute. The refusal to sell is mere speculation. The fact that none of Wilde's contemporaries mentioned the incident of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* that supposedly happened, while the boycott of George Moore's *Esther Waters*, which was much less topical than this one, was widely reported and discussed, provides further evidence that Wilde's work was not rejected. Given that the censorship of literary works by private enterprises was still topical in the 1890s, it is unbelievable that the rejection of Wilde's novel would not have been covered by any newspaper. It makes no sense, except to think that such a thing did not exist at all. It is also clear that this was not the case in the 1895 Wilde trial. Wilde's lawyer argued that the piece was not a social evil because it was sold uninterruptedly, and the other side, which would have liked to take advantage of it in any way, never once touched on the boycott. Therefore, it would be safe to say that W. H. Smith's refusal to sell did not happen at all.

Keywords: Wilde; Dorian Gray; W. H. Smith; *Lippincott's*

1. Introduction

Oscar Wilde is now seen in gay culture as a martyr who was shut out of a society where homophobia was rampant. Quoting Michel Foucault on homosexuality in Victorian society, Rainer Emig states that Wilde is its best-known victim (Emig 2018, p. 220). In recent years, temples were built in London and New York City, with Wilde as a symbol of LGBT rights.¹ His tomb in Paris, where he died, has been visited by many LGBT people (Frankel 2011); it has become a holy place for sexual minorities. The reason for this, of course, is that modern people understand that he was unjustly oppressed, tried, and socially annihilated by intolerant Victorians because he was a homosexual. The rationale that is often cited when his ostracism is told is that the July issue of *Lippincott's Magazine*, which contained *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, was boycotted by W. H. Smith.

This novel first appeared in *Lippincott's Magazine* before it was published as a book in 1891. It is also very interesting that the "uncensored" original manuscript, before it was altered by the editors of *Lippincott*, was published in 2011. Here, the editor of the uncensored version, Nicholas Frankel, tells readers about how the work was discriminated against, as follows:

¹ Peter McGough and David McDermott built Wilde's temples in 2017 and 2019. The locations are in New York and London, respectively. This is a kind of performance as an art form, but it uses Wilde as a symbol of the martyrs of LGBT discrimination. More information is available at The Oscar Wilde Temple (<https://www.oscarwildetemple.org>).

When Wilde's novel appeared in *Lippincott's* in the summer of 1890, it was subjected to a torrent of abuse in the British press, chiefly on account of its latent or not-so-latent homoeroticism. British reviewers were virtually unanimous in condemning Wilde for what one termed 'writing stuff that were better unwritten.' . . . As a consequence, Britain's largest bookseller, W. H. Smith & Son, took the unusual step of pulling the July number of *Lippincott's* from its railway bookstalls. (Frankel 2011, p. 3)

Wilde was thus severely criticized by critics for putting homosexual elements in his work, and even the work itself was almost excluded from the market.² It is unthinkable today, at least in the Western world, that this work had to be treated in this way. Moreover, this statement of Frankel's is not eccentric; rather, it is the generally accepted view. What is more egregious about this novel is that, in the trials of Wilde, it was used against him as evidence to testify to his personality. The trials ruined Wilde both socially and economically. In this way, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* has a great deal of meaning for Wilde's life. However, I believe that we must be aware that even well-told stories can be wrong.

This paper argues that *Lippincott's* version of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* has no history of being rejected by any bookstore, including that of W. H. Smith. In Section 2, the current views on the rejection of this work will be introduced, and the problems of these discourses will also be argued. In Section 3, the boycott of the work will be examined from the criticism at the time of its publication. In particular, the articles in *St. James's Gazette* and *Scots Observer*, which had strong motives for mentioning this and using it against Wilde, will be discussed. In Section 4, this paper will examine the public reaction to the boycott of *Esther Waters* in 1894, for which there is plenty of evidence, and compare it to the case of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In Section 5, the rejection of this work in the Wilde trials will be discussed. In this section, I would also like to analyse the reputation of the piece, focusing on the words of the Marquess of Queensberry, who tried to prove that the work was evil, with even stronger motives than *St. James's Gazette* or *Scots Observer* once had. It is a matter of asserting that there was no rejection by W.H. Smith, but it is very difficult to prove the non-existence of something that does not exist. Therefore, the method of approaching the truth is to give a number of examples of contradictions that may have arisen if the rejection had actually occurred.

2. Current Discourse on the Rejection of W. H. Smith and Its Problems

The rejection of W. H. Smith is something that is commonly mentioned when the novel's reputation at the time is talked about. For example, the British Library's web catalogue tells us the same thing as background information on the work: "Britain's largest bookseller, W H Smith & Son, refused to stock the July edition of the magazine ([The Picture of Dorian Gray as First Published in Lippincott's Magazine n.d.](#))"; in 2014, when the work came in at 27th in *The Guardian's* 'The Best 100 Novels', Robert McCrum, said in an explanatory note to the general readership, "Several British reviewers condemned the book for immorality. The novel became so controversial that W. H. Smith withdrew that month's edition of *Lippincott's* from its railway station bookstalls" (McCrum 2014). Compared to Frankel, who states that almost all critics opposed the work, McCrum's note is much milder. In an entry on Wilde in the latest edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, revised in 2014, Owen Dudley Edwards, of Wilde studies fame, writes, "Despite, or possibly because, W. H. Smith refused to stock it ('filthy' was his description), it was the most famous novel of its time" (Edwards 2014). This quote discusses the popularity of the novel in relation to W. H. Smith's drastic response to it. On the contrary, another prominent Wilde researcher, Joseph Bristow, states that "At any rate, W. H. Smith, the country's largest booksellers, withdrew copies from circulation. The story therefore could hardly be regarded

² After Wilde's conviction, Locke withdrew the work from publication, and circulation of the work almost ceased. There is another account of this, according to Simon Stern, who quotes the bookstore's testimony, as follows: "Edward Baker, a second-hand book dealer in Birmingham, claimed that after Wilde's trial, *Dorian Gray* "was suppressed by the publishers, who declined to sell another copy, although they were inundated with orders." (Stern 2017).

as a resounding success—at least in Britain” (Bristow 2004, p. 19), suggesting that the boycott did not result in commercial success for the magazine that carried the work. In any case, both of them agree that the work was boycotted. As if these examples are enough, the rejection of the novel by this bookstore is not only commonly stated, but treated as a scholarly accepted fact.

The source of all these studies or comments referring to this seems to be a single letter³ that appears in Merlin Holland’s—Wilde’s only grandson—book *Irish Peacock & Scarlet Marquess: The Real Trials of Oscar Wilde*, published in 2003. It is dated 10 July 1890 and addressed to Wilde by Ward, Lock, & Co., the British distributor of the American *Lippincott’s Magazine*. The original letter is kept in a Public Record Office and reads as follows:

We have received an intimation from Messrs W. H. Smith & Son this morning to the effect that your story, having been characterized by the press as a filthy one, they are obliged to withdraw Lippincott’s Magazine from their bookstalls. (Holland 2003, p. 310)

When Holland quoted this letter with a reference, the story of this denial slowly spread among researchers, and then came to be regarded as an unassailable fact, as it is today. It is a very compelling letter that tells the story of how Wilde’s novel was met with controversy at the time of its publication. It is also reasonable to think that this bookstore had the intention of removing all copies of the July issue of the magazine. It is understandable when Joseph Bristow confidently states, “the largest bookseller in the land, W. H. Smith, wrote to Ward, Lock & Co. stating that they had withdrawn the July 1890 issue of *Lippincott’s* from sale”, (Bristow 2005, p. xxiv). However, the phrase “[T]hey are obliged to withdraw Lippincott’s Magazine” only reveals that the action was about to be taken and does not necessarily mean that the action was carried out. It is, perhaps, inappropriate to draw conclusions from circumstantial evidence. The problem with concluding that the bookstore had carried it out is that there is no further evidence for this. It would therefore be a bit hasty to determine that W. H. Smith rejected the novel on the basis of this letter alone. Richard Ellmann, who published a biographical book on Wilde more than a decade before Holland’s book, also wrote a story of this rejection: “Dorian Gray was published as a book in April 1891. Almost at once W. H. Smith refused to carry it, on the grounds that it was ‘filthy’”, (Ellmann 1987, p. 323). This story of Ellmann’s, however, did not receive much attention. Perhaps this is because he did not give a reference. Scholars were right to be cautious about what Ellmann presented, for there are some errors in the following respects: first, that it was not Wilde’s book that was allegedly rejected, but the magazine in which it appeared, and second, that the year the letter was sent was 1890, not 1891. However, it is possible that Ellmann saw or heard about this letter, as he correctly cites the word ‘filthy’ as a reason for rejecting Wilde’s work. After the publication of Holland’s book, the case of the boycott of W. H. Smith became a well-known story and is now being discussed as mentioned above. Now, I would like to discuss how the media at the time reported the incident.

3. Media Reaction at the Time

In order to examine the contemporaneous reputation of the work, articles on the *The Picture of Dorian Gray* from the British Newspaper Archive were examined. An exact search was conducted with the keyword “Dorian Gray”, and the period was set as January to December 1890.⁴ A cross-search

³ Since this letter carries Smith’s words, there should be a letter from the bookstore, but it is nowhere to be found. Nor is there any document that cites the letter. Of course, there is no recorded reply from Wilde either. Only this letter or other scholars’ discourses based on the letter are quoted. To show a few exceptions, Peter Raby “Poisoned by a book: the lethal aura of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*” in *Oscar Wilde in Context* (Raby 2013) does not show its source, nor does Joseph Bristow in ‘The Introduction’ to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (2005). Rainer Emig also does not show it in the paper ‘Comparative Decadence? Male Queerness in Late Nineteenth- and Late Twentieth-Century Fiction’ in *Intersections of Gender, Class, and Race in the Long Nineteenth Century and Beyond* (Emig 2018). Simon Stern refers to Neil McKenna’s *The Secret Life of Oscar Wilde* (2003), noting that the original letter is kept in the National Archives under ref CRIM 1/41/6.

⁴ This search of the database was conducted on 16 May 2020. The URL of the result page is shown below: <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/search/results/1890-01-01/1890-12-31?basicsearch=%22dorian%20gray%22&phr>

of all 325 newspapers yielded a total of 108 articles, excluding advertisements. Of those, there were 84 articles in June and July, only 4 in August, and the remaining 20 in September and October. In other words, most of the articles about this work had been released by the end of July after the publication of the work; a lot of the criticism was concentrated in about a month. It is reasonable to think from the number of newspaper articles that the uproar over this piece would subside in a short period of time. Many newspapers have attacked this novel, with *St. James's Gazette* and *Scots Observer* being particularly best known for their hostile reviews of the novel.

Just four days after this novel was published, *St. James's Gazette* began publishing severe criticisms of it. Under the title "A Study of Puppydom", the article thoroughly ridiculed the piece and even recommended that it be punished by the law: "Whether the Treasury or the Vigilance Society will think it worthwhile to prosecute Mr. Oscar Wilde or Messrs. Ward, Lock & Co., we do not know; but on the whole we hope they will not", ([A study of Puppydom 1890](#), p. 4). This passage goes on to remind the reader that Henry Vizetelly was tried and convicted by them.⁵ On this article, Wilde sent a rebuttal letter, strongly accusing the paper of recommending censorship, which the paper denied, as follows: "The authors of books of a much less questionable character have been proceeded against by the Treasury or the Vigilance Society; but we expressly said that we hoped Mr. Wilde's masterpiece would be left alone." ([Mr. Oscar Wilde Again 1890](#), p. 5). Here, too, while ironically stating the novel was a "masterpiece", the possibility of Wilde being sued was palpable. It could even be taken as promoting the momentum to appeal to the public. Wilde had argued that ethics and art should be considered separately, but this newspaper's stance was based on the premise that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was boring and not worth reading, so they argued to no avail.

Scot's Observer began its attack on Wilde on July 5. This, too, is poignant, as it condemned the content of the work as degrading: "The story—which deals with matters only fitted for the Criminal Investigation Department or a hearing in camera—is discreditable alike to author and editor." ([Mason 1908](#), p. 31).⁶ Additionally, this article cites the Cleveland Street Scandal,⁷ which came to light the previous year, when it was revealed that men of high class had been buying young boy prostitutes and some of them were mail carriers. It states that he should stop writing about "outlawed noblemen and perverted telegraph-boys", ([Mason 1908](#), p. 31), and should use his talent for better things. This article condemns the work on the premise that it is a low, vile story. In response to this accusation, Wilde attempted to rebut it, in the same manner as he did to *St. James's Gazette*, by stating that the artistic value of a work should not be judged by whether it is moral or not. They argued, again, to no avail.⁸ However, in these series of attacks and counter-arguments, nothing was mentioned about W. H. Smith. Despite the fact that these two newspapers attempted to attack Wilde's work as much as possible, and even recommended legal action be taken, they did not take the opportunity to reinforce their argument by covering the rejection. Not only that, but in more than 100 articles published in 1890 or in any year, none of them covered the W. H. Smith incident.

Indeed, given that it is a monthly magazine, it might be natural that the July issue, which was published in late June, would be withdrawn somewhere in late July. However, there is no need to assume that today's practice of having to remove the previous issue when the next one comes out is the same as it was then. For example, the May issue of *Blackwood Magazine*, which carried *The Battle of*

asesearch=dorian%20gray&exactsearch=true&contenttype=article&retrievecountrycounts=false&sortorder=dayearly (accessed 16 May 2020).

⁵ This organisation accused Vizetelly of publishing an English version of Émile Zola's novels and he was fined £100 in 1888 and imprisoned for three months the following year ([Manchester 2001](#), p. 2584).

⁶ Stuart Mason, *Oscar Wilde: Art and Morality, A Defense of "The Picture of Dorian Gray"* ([Mason 1908](#)), 31, *Project Gutenberg*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/33689/33689-h/33689-h.htm> (accessed 7 May 2020).

⁷ In 1889, a brothel in Cleveland Street in London, where male prostitutes had male customers, was raided by the police, and the government worked to prevent the names of the aristocrats and celebrities who were its customers from coming to light. These things were heavily reported against the efforts of the government. For details, see Montgomery Hyde's *The Cleveland Street Scandal* ([Hyde 1976](#)).

⁸ The debate between these two newspapers and Wilde is described in detail in [Mason \(1908\)](#), *Oscar Wilde: Art and Morality*.

Dorking, was published as early as May 3, but a newspaper article on June 9 said that the magazine had already been published in its sixth edition ([Local Notes 1871](#), p. 8). Nevertheless, many researchers point out that the book was rejected by the major bookstore. Whether or not the removal was coercive seems to be important to the modern views that the work was excluded from the market because it was homoerotic, and furthermore, the argument that Wilde is a victim of parochial homophobia is weak if it is not.

The letter that has often been taken up by researchers is that from 10 July 1890. This was sent at a time when most newspaper articles on the *The Picture of Dorian Gray* were being published. More to the point, at the time, W. H. Smith had a monopoly on station bookstalls in Britain ([Robbins 2001](#), p. 91). What this means is that the rejection of the piece took place throughout Britain at a time when it was most talked about. It is hard to believe that all copies of the magazine disappeared from stations across Britain and no one noticed. Even if this was done in secret for some reason, it would be impossible to conceal it, and there would have been an uproar. In fact, W. H. Smith's boycott did cause an uproar. However, it was not a boycott of Wilde's work, but of George Moore's *Esther Waters*.

4. Media Reaction to the Boycott of another Novel at the Time

There was a case in which W. H. Smith rejected a book around the same time that this novel was published. In April 1894, W. H. Smith rejected George Moore's *Esther Waters* because of its sexual content, as Stephen Regan wrote in his 2012 editorial note to the work. Within a month of its publication, however, *Esther Waters* was banned by W. H. Smith, an event that was to give the novel massive publicity, with numerous articles about 'The Boycotted Book' appearing in the *Daily Chronicle* in the spring of 1894 ([Regan 2012](#), p. xxxv).

Unlike the case of Wilde, in this case, there are many records of that time. An exact search of the British Newspaper Archive⁹ under the keywords 'George Moore' and 'Esther Waters' found 148 matching articles, excluding advertisements, from the first half of 1894, of which 133 were from the three months between April and June. The highest number was found for May, for which there were 63 articles, and at least 40 of them contained news about the boycott. *Daily Chronicle*, *Pall Mall Gazette*, *Globe*, and *St. James's Gazette*, as well as many other leading newspapers, covered the story. *Esther Waters* was rejected because of its overt sexuality, but in response to the growing condemnation of the book selection policy, the bookstore had to explain it. *St. James's Gazette* took a positive view of the bookstore's response, with a representative of W. H. Smith giving the following excuse:

We are not professors of literature or leaders of public taste. We are shopkeepers, purveying certain articles; and we supply what our customers like, or what we think they like... There is no question of a literary censorship; and if anybody does not like the kind of books sent out by our library he has his remedy—he can deal elsewhere. ([Concerning the boycott of "Esther Waters" 1894](#), p. 4)

Esther Waters did not get much attention until it was rejected by W. H. Smith. This case is a story of the refusal of W. H. Smith's book lending shop, which is not the same as selling magazines in a station bookstore, but this shows that, even in the nineteenth century, the rejection of novels by prominent authors by major bookstores was not something that could be hidden. As Owen Edwards said, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was the most famous work of its time, and besides, the novel was very much talked about in the media at that time. If a magazine with such a work had disappeared from every railway station in Britain, it would have been an even bigger story than the case of *Esther Waters*. Even more interestingly, when *Esther Waters* was being talked about, none of the articles mentioned

⁹ This search of the database was conducted on 11 October 2020. The URL of the result page is shown below: <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/search/results/1894-01-01/1894-12-31?basicsearch=%22george%20moore%22%20%22esther%20waters%22&phrasessearch=george%20moore&somesssearch=%22esther%20waters%22&exactsearch=false&contenttype=article%2cillustrated&retrievecountrycounts=false&sortorder=score>.

The Picture Dorian Gray, a rejection by the same company that has been said to have happened just four years earlier. For example, an article in *Leeds Mercury* cites examples of works that were condemned for their immoral content before George Moore. The details are as follows:

[I]t appears not only unjust, but ridiculous, to subject his novel to this pettily tyrannical censorship. One is reminded of the regulations at the Melbourne Custom House, which rigorously exclude from Victorian soil all books either written or published by the late Mr. Henry Vizetelly ... Mr. George Moore ... may console himself with the remembrance that he is not the first eminent writer of fiction who has been placed under the ban of the "unco guid." Thirty years ago very many British mammas declined to allow their daughters to read "Vanity Fair" ... "Jane Eyre" has been even more extensively boycotted by British maternity: and "Ouida" is still a name which makes many parental cheeks turn pale with affright. ([Echoes of the Week 1894](#), p. 12)

With the exception of Henry Vizetelly, the works of *Vanity Fair* and *Jane Eyre* are very old compared to Wilde's novel. Ouida (Marie Louise de la Ramée) is still well-known today, but it is doubtful that she was as highly talked about as Wilde was at the time. It is hard to believe that the author of this article did not mention Wilde (at a time when he was at the height of his popularity, a year before the first trial) while remembering other older works and writers.

How about the much-talked-about Wilde trials? The person whom Wilde sued (the Marquess of Queensberry) was trying to prove that Wilde was a detriment to society. While his side did everything in its power to make Wilde and his works look bad, Wilde's side did the best to defend him. It is inconceivable that the rejection by W. H. Smith would not have been discussed on such an occasion.

5. Wilde Trials

On 2 March 1895, the Queensberry, father of Wilde's lover Alfred Douglas, was arrested for cursing Wilde as a 'sodomite'. He admitted that he had called Wilde a sodomite in the letter he had written to Wilde, but in the Plea of Justification, which was presented on 30 March 1895, four days before the first trial, he argued that he had reason to call Wilde that and that it was done for the benefit of the public. The Lippincott's edition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was mentioned as one of Wilde's questionable acts.¹⁰ In order to justify the act of calling Wilde a pervert, the Marquess of Queensberry argued that the work was written with the following intent in mind: "to describe the relations intimacies and passions of certain persons of sodomitical and unnatural habits tastes and practices" ([Holland 2003](#), p. 290). He further explained that this was "calculated to subvert morality and to encourage unnatural vice" ([Holland 2003](#), p. 291). At this point, neither the Marquess of Queensberry nor his lawyers had said how the public reacted to the novel. They were merely paying attention to its content. In response to this testimony, Edward Clarke, who was Wilde's attorney, said the following in his opening speech:

[A] volume published by him with his name upon the title page called '*The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde', a book published by him as they say. I wonder when they said in that plea 'with his name upon the title page' they did not see that to attack a man for being guilty of describing and encouraging sodomitical practices in the ground that he had written a book which for five years 'with his name upon the title page' has been upon the bookstalls and at bookshops and in libraries was a very extraordinary method of attack. ([Holland 2003](#), p. 41)

The lawyer's defense of Wilde in response to the Plea of Justification was to point out that the novel was widely sold or borrowed during the five years between its publication and the time of

¹⁰ In the plea made by Queensberry, the novel was specified as Lippincott's version: "[T]he said Oscar ... Wilde in the month of July in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and ninety did write and publish and cause and procure to be printed and published with his name upon the title page", [Holland 2003](#) and [Montgomery Hyde, *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* \(Hyde 1973, p. 215\)](#).

this trial. Therefore, the argument is that this commercial record is evidence of the work's public acceptance; if a certain novel has been sold openly for a long time, regardless of its content, then it is socially acceptable. If it had been true that W. H. Smith rejected the piece, this speech by Clarke would have been meaningless. Furthermore, he made it clear that the work had been sold or borrowed for five years. Moreover, Clarke even included bookstalls where copies of the magazine were sold. As far as he knew, at least, they continued to be sold in the station bookstores where W. H. Smith had a monopoly. If all the July issues of *Lippincott's* had disappeared from all of W. H. Smith's bookstores, everyone in the courtroom would have known and remembered it. Therefore, it is inconceivable that Clarke would act as if he were deliberately unaware of this rejection. When Clarke finished his initial speech, he began asking Wilde questions about the public's reaction to the novel when it came out:

CLARKE. [W]as it somewhat wildly noticed and reviewed?

WILDE. Yes, very much—very much so indeed.

CLAEKE. And has it been in circulation and on sale from that time to this?

WILDE. From that time to this. (Holland 2003, p. 63)

In the conversation here, “[f]rom that time to this”, Wilde indirectly states that the sale denial did not occur. However, to this statement by Wilde, Merlin Holland comments in an annotation that Wilde was not being honest. In this comment, Holland quotes the text of a letter to Wilde that is still used today as evidence for the refusal. This note describes the statement by Wilde as “[t]his is inaccurate and glosses over the storm of critical protest engendered by the first publication in *Lippincott's Magazine*.” (Holland 2003, p. 310). However, the quoted letter only mentions how strong the criticism was, and does not technically prove that Wilde's work was removed from the bookshelves. Therefore, there is no solid evidence in Holland's view to contradict this testimony given by Wilde.

After Edward Clarke finished his initial speech and questioning of Wilde, it was the turn of opposing lawyer Edward Carson to ask questions. As the conversation turned to Wilde's novel, he began to ask the following questions:

CARSON. As regards *Dorian Gray*, ... I think you told us that you first published that in *Lippincott's Magazine*?

WILDE. Yes.

CARSON. There were a good many criticisms upon it?

WILDE. Yes.

CARSON. And I think that you took notice of one of those yourself?

WILDE. Of several of them.

CARSON. I only know one. There was one from the *Scots Observer*. (Holland 2003, p. 71)

In this conversation, Carson asks about the media's reaction without mentioning the W. H. Smith incident, which should have been of great help in developing the argument that this work was detrimental to society. Then, the lawyer moved on to the immoral and homosexual references in the content of the piece. He neither questioned nor rebutted any of Wilde's statements “[f]rom that time to this”, not only at this time, but also at any other occasion throughout the trial. If W. H. Smith had really refused to sell the publication, the Marquess of Queensberry and the lawyer could easily have found out more about it. However, as noted above, they did not dispute the sales record. Additionally, if there had been such strong public opposition to the novel, Wilde's release of the book version of the work in 1891 would also have allowed the opponents to criticize Wilde as being an anti-social evil. In response to Clarke's statement that it had been in circulation for five years and Wilde's similar statement, Carson should have had a strong incentive to prove it was a lie, but he did not make any move to disprove it. Furthermore, he made an argument in line with the statements of Wilde and his attorneys about the sales record:

But Mr. Wilde admitted to me as regards the publication of that book, and indeed it was the case of Sir Edward Clarke, that it has been published at every bookstall. ... I believe that anybody who reads it will say that I am justified in what I am saying. (Holland 2003, p. 261)

The statement, “anybody who reads it will say that I am justified in what I am saying” is based on the idea that the novel is evil. Therefore, the logic is that the fact that this work had been on the market for so long and had been read by so many people is the same thing as Wilde’s immorality having been indiscriminately disseminated. It is clear, then, that there was no objection from Carson that Wilde’s novel was sold without interruption and without being banned. The trial record shows that both the plaintiff and the defendant believed that there was no refusal to sell this work. More to the point, no one in the court was aware of the sales denial that should have occurred five years ago.

6. Conclusions

Wilde’s only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, is widely said to have been rejected by W. H. Smith, but there is no doubt that it did not happen. The W. H. Smith story appears to have widely spread since 2003, when Holland quoted a letter to Wilde from the publisher in his book. With the exception of a few scholars, such as Ellmann, this was not mentioned until the turn of the century. For example, a book entitled *The Picture of Dorian Gray (Note)*, published in 1999, provides rich background information about this work. The book refers to articles in the *St. James’s Gazette* and the *Daily Chronicle*, and high appraisals of the book by Conan Doyle, W. B. Yeats, James Joyce, and others, but in regard to the boycott, it tells readers nothing. The Penguin Classics introduction also describes the media’s reaction, but does not describe Smith’s case (Mighall 2000, pp. ix–xxiv; Ackroyd 2000, pp. 224–30). The story does not even appear in Barbara Belford’s biography of Wilde—*Oscar Wilde: A Certain Genius* (2000)¹¹. Generally speaking, books written in the early 2000s or earlier do not mention the case and Wilde himself does not mention it, of course. However, there are passages in some of his letters that can be read as a keen recognition of the influence of W. H. Smith, addressed to his lover Robert Ross and the publisher Leonard Smithers, who arranged for the publication of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, which had been released a year after his release from prison. A letter from 10 May 1898 to Ross states, “The chance of a popular edition of *The Ballad* depends entirely on Smith’s bookstalls” (Wilde 2011, p. 1064), and one to Smithers in the same year dated 8 May states, “Let me know about Smith’s bookstalls, and *The Ballad*. It seems to me that the whole thing largely depending on him”, (Wilde 2011, p. 1061), indicating that he had high expectations of the bookstore for the sales of his poetry collection. The fact that he had such high hopes for the bookstore suggests that the bookstore was too influential for Wilde to ignore, perhaps, even at the time of the publication of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Therefore, Wilde was concerned about the influence of the bookstore when *The Ballad* was published, but it nevertheless makes sense that Wilde’s letters do not mention W. H. Smith at all regarding Lippincott’s version of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, as the boycott never happened in the first place.

Holland’s discovery of the letter and the writings on which it was based have unanimously been seen as evidence of the rejection of Wilde’s only novel by Victorian society, or as a foreshadowing of Wilde’s downfall (Wilde 2011). In light of this trend, it is persuasive to assert that the novel worked against him as evidence in the trials. However, both the impact and the influence of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* on the trials seem to have been exaggerated. Indeed, when the Marquess of Queensberry was sued by Wilde, he did not have any concrete evidence of Wilde’s lewd acts with boys, and his lawyers sought evidence in Wilde’s written materials, but once the evidence of Wilde’s lewd acts was collected by private investigators, they focused on that. However, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was not used as evidence at all in the latter two trials after Wilde was accused. He was criminally charged with lewdness in the Savoy Hotel and other places with poor boys of low class. Not only that, but at the end of the second trial, the judge told the jury not to consider his authorship of the novel as the basis for their decision. He was charged and found guilty of committing lewdness with several boys, including Walter Grainger, who was then 16 years old in 1893 and a servant in the room that Alfred

¹¹ The story of the time when this work was published is detailed in the chapter ‘Dorian Prophecy’ in *Oscar Wilde: A Certain Genius* (Belford 2000).

Douglas rented (Hyde 1973, p. 133, 270).¹² Therefore, correctly speaking, the work was only presented as evidence at the first trial (not the trials) in which Wilde was a plaintiff.¹³

The publication of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was certainly a turning point in Wilde's work. He brought this work into the world, which brought him and Alfred Douglas together and his life of pleasure-seeking accelerated. At Douglas' instigation, he sued Douglas' father. The lawyer for his father's side initially focused his analysis on the two versions of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to defend the father, and as a result, Wilde's own criminal misdeeds were revealed. Therefore, in addition to the literary value of the work, it is undoubtedly of high value as a source for the study of his life. However, it is unfortunate that this exaggerated story has been added to the background information of the novel. Any exaggerations and falsehoods about Wilde, who is fascinating both in his way of life and his works, may undermine his value.

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¹² See page 222 in *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* for the judgment and verdict in the third trial and pages 323–27 for the Plea of Justification. (Hyde 1973)

¹³ In the first trial, which lasted three days, the novel's role seems to be smaller than it is supposed to be. According to the unredacted transcript of the trial published by Holland, questions relating to the novel were only raised on the first day, and the amount of transcribed relevant passages is less than a tenth of the total. For the most part, there were a lot of questions and answers about his relationship with the poor boys he was acquainted with.

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