Close Reading Exercise

*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Chapter 3

He played with the idea and grew willful; tossed it into the air and transformed it; let it escape and recaptured it; made it iridescent with fancy and winged it with paradox. The praise of folly, as he went on, soared into a philosophy, and philosophy herself became young, and catching the mad music of pleasure, wearing, one might fancy, her wine-stained robe and wreath of ivy, danced like a Bacchante over the hills of life, and mocked the slow Silenus for being sober. Facts fled before her like frightened forest things. Her white feet trod the huge press at which wise Omar sits, till the seething grape-juice rose round her bare limbs in waves of purple bubbles, or crawled in red foam over the vat’s black, dripping, sloping sides. It was an extraordinary improvisation. He felt that the eyes of Dorian Gray were fixed on him, and the consciousness that amongst his audience there was one whose temperament he wished to fascinate seemed to give his wit keenness and to lend colour to his imagination. He was brilliant, fantastic, irresponsible. He charmed his listeners out of themselves, and they followed his pipe, laughing. Dorian Gray never took his gaze off him, but sat like one under a spell, smiles chasing each other over his lips and wonder growing grave in his darkening eyes.

At last, liveried in the costume of the age, reality entered the room in the shape of a servant to tell the duchess that her carriage was waiting. She wrung her hands in mock despair. “How annoying!” she cried. “I must go. I have to call for my husband at the club, to take him to some absurd meeting at Willis’s Rooms, where he is going to be in the chair. If I am late he is sure to be furious, and I couldn’t have a scene in this bonnet. It is far too fragile. A harsh word would ruin it. No, I must go, dear Agatha. Good-bye, Lord Henry, you are quite delightful and dreadfully demoralizing. I am sure I don’t know what to say about your views. You must come and dine with us some night. Tuesday? Are you disengaged Tuesday?”

“For you I would throw over anybody, Duchess,” said Lord Henry with a bow.

“Ah! that is very nice, and very wrong of you,” she cried; “so mind you come” and she swept out of the room, followed by Lady Agatha and the other ladies.

