



# REPRESENTING PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS IN THE NOVEL “THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY” BY OSCAR WILDE

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## Abstract

This article examines the representation of psychological problems in the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde. The study focuses on the inner conflicts of the protagonist, the influence of moral corruption, and the psychological consequences of excessive aestheticism and hedonism. Through literary analysis, the article explores how the author depicts identity crisis, moral disintegration, narcissism, and guilt in the character of Dorian Gray. The research demonstrates that Wilde’s novel not only reflects aesthetic philosophy but also reveals profound psychological tensions associated with human desire, conscience, and moral responsibility.

**Keywords:** Psychological conflict, aestheticism, moral corruption, narcissism, identity crisis, Victorian literature.

## Introduction

The novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, written by Oscar Wilde and published in 1890, is one of the most significant works of English literature associated with the philosophy of aestheticism. Although the novel is often interpreted as a philosophical exploration of beauty and art, it also presents a profound psychological study of the human mind. Wilde depicts the internal transformation of the protagonist, Dorian Gray, whose obsession with eternal youth and beauty gradually leads him into moral decline and psychological turmoil.



The psychological dimension of the novel is particularly important because it reveals the destructive effects of excessive self-indulgence and the loss of ethical boundaries. Through the symbolic relationship between Dorian Gray and his portrait, Wilde illustrates how suppressed guilt, vanity, and fear shape the protagonist's mental state. Therefore, the novel provides valuable insight into psychological processes such as moral alienation, narcissism, and internal conflict.

The aim of this article is to analyze how psychological problems are represented in the novel and how they influence the development of the protagonist's character.

### **Literature Review**

Scholars have long recognized the philosophical and psychological depth of Wilde's novel. Critics often associate the work with the aesthetic movement of the late nineteenth century, which emphasized beauty, art, and individual experience. However, many literary researchers have also emphasized the psychological complexity of the characters. The influence of characters such as Lord Henry Wotton on Dorian Gray has been widely discussed in literary criticism. Lord Henry represents a philosophy of hedonism and intellectual manipulation, encouraging Dorian to pursue pleasure without moral limitations. As a result, Dorian becomes increasingly detached from reality and moral responsibility.

Modern literary criticism also interprets the novel through psychological theories, suggesting that Dorian Gray embodies narcissistic tendencies and experiences a growing sense of guilt and paranoia. His portrait becomes a symbolic manifestation of his subconscious mind, revealing the hidden consequences of his immoral actions.

### **Methodology**

The research is based on qualitative literary analysis. The study uses the following methods:

Textual analysis to examine narrative episodes and character development.

Psychological interpretation to analyze emotional and mental states of characters.



Symbolic analysis to interpret the meaning of the portrait as a representation of conscience and psychological deterioration.

These methods help to explore how Wilde integrates psychological themes into the narrative structure of the novel.

### **Materials and Discussion**

One of the central psychological problems in the novel is Dorian Gray's identity crisis. At the beginning of the story, Dorian appears innocent and impressionable. However, after realizing the power of his beauty, he becomes increasingly obsessed with his own appearance. His wish that the portrait should age instead of him symbolizes an extreme form of narcissism and self-obsession. The desire to preserve eternal youth leads Dorian to separate his physical identity from his moral self. As a result, he gradually loses the ability to recognize the consequences of his actions. This separation between appearance and conscience becomes the foundation of his psychological instability.

Another psychological factor in the novel is the influence of Lord Henry Wotton. His philosophical ideas encourage Dorian to pursue pleasure as the ultimate goal of life. Through persuasive language and intellectual manipulation, Lord Henry shapes Dorian's worldview and weakens his moral resistance. As Dorian adopts this philosophy, he begins to experiment with various forms of pleasure and indulgence. However, this lifestyle leads not to happiness but to increasing psychological emptiness and moral corruption.

As the story progresses, Dorian's internal conflict becomes more intense. Although he attempts to ignore the consequences of his actions, the changing portrait constantly reminds him of his guilt. The portrait becomes a visual representation of his hidden conscience and moral degradation. This psychological tension gradually transforms into fear and paranoia. Dorian becomes increasingly isolated and anxious, realizing that his secret could destroy his reputation. Ultimately, his attempt to destroy the portrait results in his own death, symbolizing the inevitable collapse of a life built on deception and moral denial.

The portrait itself plays a crucial symbolic role in representing psychological conflict. It reflects the moral consequences of Dorian's actions, functioning as an



external manifestation of his conscience. While Dorian's physical appearance remains youthful and beautiful, the portrait reveals the true state of his soul.

This artistic device allows Wilde to explore the contrast between external beauty and internal corruption. The portrait thus becomes a psychological mirror that exposes the hidden effects of guilt, vanity, and moral irresponsibility.

The analysis shows that the novel presents a complex psychological portrait of a character who gradually loses control over his moral and emotional life. Wilde demonstrates that the pursuit of beauty and pleasure without ethical responsibility leads to psychological instability and self-destruction.

The character of Dorian Gray illustrates several psychological problems, including narcissism, moral alienation, identity crisis, and suppressed guilt. Through symbolic narrative techniques, Wilde successfully connects aesthetic philosophy with psychological analysis.

## **Results**

The analysis of the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde demonstrates that the author skillfully portrays a wide range of psychological problems through the development of the protagonist and the symbolic structure of the narrative. The study reveals that Dorian Gray's character undergoes a profound psychological transformation, which is closely connected with his moral choices and philosophical influences. One of the key results of the analysis is the identification of narcissism and self-obsession as central psychological traits in Dorian Gray's personality. His overwhelming admiration for his own beauty leads him to prioritize physical appearance over moral integrity. This narcissistic tendency gradually separates his external identity from his inner moral consciousness, creating a deep psychological conflict within the character. Another important finding concerns the influence of external ideological forces on Dorian's psychological development. The philosophical ideas promoted by Lord Henry Wotton encourage Dorian to embrace hedonism and to pursue pleasure without ethical limitations. As a result, Dorian begins to adopt a worldview that rejects moral responsibility and values aesthetic experience above human empathy and social norms. The research also reveals that guilt and suppressed conscience play a significant role in the psychological dynamics of



the novel. Although Dorian attempts to conceal the consequences of his actions, the portrait functions as a symbolic representation of his internal moral state. Each immoral action leaves a visible mark on the portrait, reflecting the gradual deterioration of his psychological and spiritual condition. This artistic device illustrates how suppressed guilt can manifest indirectly and influence an individual's mental stability.

Furthermore, the analysis highlights the presence of psychological isolation and paranoia in the later stages of the narrative. As Dorian becomes increasingly aware of the secret hidden within the portrait, he experiences growing fear and anxiety. His attempt to maintain a perfect public image intensifies his inner tension and ultimately leads to psychological breakdown.

Overall, the results indicate that Wilde's novel offers a complex exploration of psychological problems, including narcissism, moral alienation, guilt, and identity crisis. Through the tragic fate of Dorian Gray, the author illustrates how the denial of ethical responsibility and the pursuit of superficial ideals can lead to profound psychological and moral consequences.

### **Conclusion**

The representation of psychological problems in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* reveals the profound moral and psychological implications of aestheticism and hedonism. Through the tragic transformation of Dorian Gray, Oscar Wilde explores the consequences of excessive self-indulgence and the denial of moral responsibility. The novel demonstrates that beauty without ethical awareness can lead to psychological fragmentation and moral collapse. Wilde's work therefore remains an important literary exploration of human psychology, emphasizing the complex relationship between appearance, conscience, and identity.

Future research may further investigate psychological themes in Wilde's works using modern approaches such as psychoanalytic criticism or cognitive literary studies.

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