

ЛИЧНОСТ У САВРЕМЕНОМ СВЕТУ
ИДЕНТИТЕТ, ХЕТЕРОНОМИЈА И НАСИЉЕ
СЛУЧАЈ
КОСОВО И МЕТОХИЈА

ЛИЧНОСТ *у савременом свету*

ИДЕНТИТЕТ, ХЕТЕРОНОМИЈА И НАСИЉЕ

СЛУЧАЈ

КОСОВО И МЕТОХИЈА



Тематски зборник научних радова од међународног значаја

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THE AUTHOR'S AESTHETIC ECHO AND THE SHADOW OF VIOLENCE: OSCAR WILDE'S PERSONA MIRRORED IN THE PROTAGONIST OF *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY*

Abstract: This essay argues that Oscar Wilde's complex persona tapestry woven from his Irish heritage, classical education, aesthetic philosophies, battles with societal judgment, and profound moral ambiguities finds intricate and artistic reflection in the character of Dorian Gray. Through a nuanced exploration of personality, the pervasive shadow of violence (psychological, moral, and physical), and the seductive allure of aestheticism in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, this study reveals how the novel is not just a simple mirror of Wilde. Instead, it is a vibrant, critical dialogue with the multifaceted, often contradictory, aspects of his own identity and the intense societal pressures he faced. By clearly defining key terms like personality, violence, aesthetics, and authorial reflection, and through close readings that juxtapose the novel with Wilde's other writings, this essay uncovers how Dorian Gray embodies Wilde's intellectual and moral paradoxes, ultimately serving as a powerful and haunting cautionary tale of unchecked aestheticism and its destructive path.

Keywords: Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, aestheticism, persona, authorial reflection, violence, moral ambiguity, Victorian literature, authorship.

INTRODUCTION

Oscar Wilde's novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, invites us into a world where beauty hides monstrous secrets, and a young man's soul decays while his face remains eternally fair. Yet, beneath this captivating story lies a deeper truth: the novel is not merely a standalone masterpiece, but a profound reflection of Wilde himself. His vibrant persona forged from his Irish roots, shaped by a classical education, infused with his groundbreaking aesthetic philosophies, and scarred by society's harsh judgments and his own complex morality is intricately

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and artistically woven into the very fabric of *Dorian Gray*. This essay explores how Wilde's own spirit echoes in the novel, focusing on how personality, the pervasive shadow of violence (whether psychological, moral, or physical), and the seductive pull of aesthetics and artifice manifest in Dorian's story.

We will see how the novel becomes a dynamic, critical conversation with Wilde's own multifaceted and often contradictory self, and with the suffocating Victorian society he both captivated and challenged. While literary terms can sometimes feel distant, we will use clear definitions to illuminate the profound connections between Wilde and his most infamous creation, understanding that this "mirroring" is as layered and complex as Wilde himself (Bennett & Royle, 2004; Richter, 1989). A guiding thread through our exploration will be Wilde's own shifting views on the novel's morality from the seemingly amoral stance of its preface to his later acknowledgment of its deeper lesson (Wilde, 1891, Preface; Wilde, 1891, "Mr. Oscar Wilde on 'Dorian Gray'"). This tension hints that *Dorian Gray* is not just a story, but a crucible where Wilde explored his own intellectual and moral paradoxes. For our journey, "personality" is not just a list of character traits. It is the carefully constructed self, the public and private faces an author might explore through their characters. It delves into their deepest motivations, internal battles, and life's journey, all contributing to the story's overall meaning (Rimmon-Kenan, 2002). In *Dorian Gray*, personality refers to the blend of traits, beliefs, and experiences that reflect Oscar Wilde himself, brought to life and examined through his character. Character analysis helps us uncover the intricate layers of these figures and their vital role in the narrative, revealing the author's intentions (Rimmon-Kenan, 2002). While 'character' is broad, 'personality' here implies a deeper individuality and the subtle, yet powerful, shifts in moral and psychological outlook (Martin, 2005). This nuanced view is essential as we witness Dorian's profound and tragic descent.

"Violence", too, extends far beyond simple physical acts. It encompasses the quiet, insidious cruelty of psychological manipulation, like Lord Henry Wotton's devastating influence on Dorian. It includes the erosion of moral character, seen in Dorian's self-corruption and his damaging impact on others. Ultimately, these internal acts of aggression tragically spill over into physical violence (Girard, 1977). The World Health Organization's definition of violence, which includes the intentional infliction of "psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation" (Krug et al., 2002), is particularly relevant here. It helps us understand the subtle torments Dorian endures from his portrait, his verbal cruelty, and the broader societal consequences of his moral decay. The term "aesthetics" will be explored within the dazzling, yet often controversial, world of Oscar Wilde and the late 19th-century Aesthetic Movement. This movement championed "Art for Art's Sake", arguing that art's supreme value lay in its beauty and refined sensory experience, free from moral or practical demands (Gagnier, 1986; Pykett, 2008). A core belief was that art does not just copy life; it actually shapes how we see the world, with truth residing in its style and form (Gagnier, 1986).

The dandy, who turned life itself into an art form, was its living symbol. However, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* itself offers a complex, even chilling, perspective on a life lived purely for art, hinting at the potential for deep immorality when beauty is pursued without boundaries (Raby, 1988). This inherent tension in Wilde's own aesthetic philosophy is central to understanding his novel. Finally, "authorial reflection" or "persona mirroring" describes how an author's personal experiences, beliefs, psychology, or even their carefully crafted public image find their way, subtly or directly, into their fictional characters (Genette, 1980; Foucault, 1979). This is not a simple autobiography, but an artistic transformation, a refracted view of the self. Thinking of the author's persona as a "second self" (Genette, 1980) helps us analyze Wilde's presence in *Dorian Gray* with sophistication, moving beyond simplistic biographical readings. In this essay, we will first sketch Oscar Wilde's life, tracing the events that shaped his public and private self. Then, we will dive into the novel's themes, examining how violence, aesthetics, and artifice shape *Dorian*, drawing clear parallels with Wilde's own experiences. The third section will offer close readings of key passages, comparing them with Wilde's other writings to reveal striking instances of persona mirroring. Our conclusion will tie these threads together, reaffirming our central argument and considering the profound implications for our understanding of Wilde and his enduring work.

OSCAR WILDE'S LIFE AND PERSONA

Oscar Wilde's life and the dazzling, yet often fragile, persona he meticulously crafted offer a vital key to unlocking the depths of his literary creations, particularly *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. His biography is not just a timeline; it is a captivating narrative of evolving ideas, public spectacles, and private struggles, all reverberating powerfully within his writing.

CONCISE BIOGRAPHICAL OVERVIEW

Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde burst into the world in Dublin on October 16, 1854. He came from a family already steeped in intellectual curiosity and public life (Ellmann, 1988). His father, Sir William Wilde, was a celebrated surgeon, but also a respected archaeologist and folklorist. His mother, Jane Francesca Elgee, gained renown as 'Speranza,' a passionate nationalist poet deeply versed in Celtic myths (Ellmann, 1988). This inheritance of literary flair, a gift for captivating audiences, and a touch of the unconventional—Speranza's fiery nationalism and Sir William's eclectic scholarly pursuits—laid a unique foundation for young Oscar. Indeed, his parents' fascination with Irish folklore and even "romantic pseudo-science" (Bristow, 2007, p. 11) might have subtly imbued Wilde with a taste for the uncanny and supernatural that permeates *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. It suggests an early immersion in stories that blurred

the lines between the rational and the mythical, likely fostering a sensibility receptive to incorporating archetypal elements like the magical portrait and the Faustian pact into his own fiction, moving beyond mere realism.

Wilde's formal education further sharpened his brilliant mind. He shone as a Classical scholar at Portora Royal School and later at Trinity College Dublin (Ellmann, 1988). A prestigious scholarship then whisked him away to Magdalen College, Oxford (1874–78), where he graduated with honors and won the esteemed Newdigate Prize for his poem *Ravenna* (Ellmann, 1988). During his Oxford years, Wilde fell under the powerful spell of two giants of Victorian art criticism: John Ruskin and Walter Pater (Ellmann, 1988; Small, 1993). Ruskin, with his earnest belief in art's moral purpose, his love for medieval craftsmanship, and his sharp critique of industrial society, offered one compelling intellectual current (Small, 1993). In contrast, Pater championed intense aesthetic experience, the famous doctrine of "art for art's sake", and the idea of living life with a "hard, gemlike flame" (Ellmann, 1988, p. 77). This intellectual dance between art's moral duty and its independent pursuit of beauty became a fundamental tension in Wilde's own thought and artistic journey.

By the early 1880s, Wilde had firmly established himself in London's glittering artistic and social circles. He quickly rose as a leading voice for the blossoming Aesthetic Movement, meticulously cultivating his image as a dazzling wit and a flamboyant dandy (Beckson, 1992). His carefully constructed public persona, often playfully mocked as an "effete dandy" (Adams, 2009, p. 19), was both adored and satirized, famously by *Punch* magazine and in Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera *Patience*. Yet, these very satires ironically amplified his burgeoning fame (Ellmann, 1988). This period also saw his marriage to Constance Lloyd in 1884, with whom he had two sons, Cyril and Vyvyan, and his editorship of *Woman's World* from 1887 to 1889 (Ellmann, 1988). While this phase might appear more conventional, it was during these years that his aesthetic theories deepened, leading to the literary masterpieces that would define his legacy.

The release of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (first serialized in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* in 1890, then expanded into a book in 1891) and the sensational success of his society comedies, like *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), cemented Wilde's literary stardom (Ellmann, 1988). However, this period of triumph was overshadowed by his deepening relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas. This affair ignited the fury of Douglas's father, the Marquess of Queensberry, culminating in a notorious public scandal and a series of three devastating trials in 1895 on charges of "gross indecency" (Kaplan, 1989). These trials brutally exposed the clash between Wilde's private life, his aesthetic philosophies (often used against him in court), and the rigid moral code of Victorian England. Found guilty, Wilde was sentenced to two grueling years of hard labor.

His imprisonment, primarily at Reading Gaol, from 1895 to 1897, was a period of agonizing suffering and profound self-reflection. It was here that he poured his soul into the long, poignant letter to Douglas, later published

as *De Profundis* (Holland, 1962; Wilde, 1905). Released a broken and financially ruined man, Wilde sought exile in France, where he died in Paris on November 30, 1900, at the age of 46 (Ellmann, 1988).

ANALYSIS OF PERSONALITY TRAITS RELEVANT TO THE NOVEL

Wilde's intricate personality, a compelling blend of philosophical conviction, performative artistry, and profound inner conflict, is crucial to understanding how he is reflected in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

His aesthetic philosophy was not just a theory; it was the core of his public identity. He passionately championed "Art for Art's Sake", insisting that art's value lay solely in its beauty and formal perfection, free from any moral lessons or practical uses (Gagnier, 1986; Pykett, 2008). A central tenet was his belief that life itself imitates art, suggesting that art actively shapes how we perceive and experience the world (Gagnier, 1986). The dandy was the living embodiment of this philosophy: Wilde saw his own life as a carefully choreographed aesthetic performance, a deliberate and "sincere and studied triviality" that subtly challenged the serious, utilitarian values of the Victorian middle class (Bristow, 2007, p. 11). This meticulously crafted public image was not just a pose; it was a strategic way of performing identity in a society Wilde both courted and provocatively questioned. This "mask" (Kohl, 1989, p. 165), while allowing him to navigate and critique Victorian norms, was a perilous act, as the tragic arc of his own life painfully revealed. The limits of such performative difference became agonizingly clear during his trials, where his aesthetic pronouncements and lifestyle were cruelly weaponized against him.

A hallmark of Wilde's intellectual makeup was his deep-seated moral ambivalence and his love for paradox. He often displayed a persistent "ambivalence of thought and feeling", an almost inherent "sensation of doubt" that seemed to stem from a reluctance to accept absolute, singular truths (Kohl, 1989, p. 165). His art frequently became a stage for exploring contradictory viewpoints, allowing him to voice diverse ideas without necessarily forcing them into neat solutions (Kohl, 1989). This was not indecisiveness; it was a sophisticated philosophical stance that embraced the multiplicity of truth and challenged the rigid, often dogmatic moral certainties of the Victorian age (Raby, 1988). Wilde famously declared, "An artist... has no ethical sympathies at all. Virtue and wickedness are to him simply motives of an art" (Wilde, 1891, Preface). Yet, his works, especially *Dorian Gray*, are profoundly concerned with the devastating consequences of moral choices (Raby, 1988). This rich contradiction lies at the heart of his genius. Some scholars even suggest Wilde harbored a concept of "ethical hedonism", where the pursuit of pleasure is balanced by reason and an awareness of its impact on oneself and others (Akudolu et al., 2021)—a view that finds its starkest warning in the tragic fate of Dorian Gray.

Wilde also harbored a deep fascination with the intricacies of human psychology and the powerful concept of duality. He seemed to glimpse modern psychological insights, captivantly exploring the “processes by which thought moves” rather than just static ideas (Kohl, 1989, p. 170). The notion that a “mask” can be more revealing of a person’s true self than their unadorned “face” was a recurring fascination in his writings (Kohl, 1989). His unforgettable aphorism, “Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth” (Wilde, 1913, “The Critic as Artist”), speaks directly to his profound understanding of identity as layered and performative. Wilde’s own public persona was such a mask, often shielding a more complex and perhaps vulnerable private reality.

The brutal impact of his trials and imprisonment utterly transformed him. *De Profundis*, penned in the crucible of his suffering, lays bare a profound shift in his perspective (Holland, 1962; Wilde, 1905). It is a document of agonizing self-reflection, where Wilde unflinchingly confronts his past excesses, acknowledges his “perversity”, and grapples with the profound weight of sorrow and the nature of humility. He wrote, with raw honesty, “I deliberately went to the depths in the search for new sensation. What the paradox was to me in the sphere of thought, perversity became to me in the sphere of passion” (Wilde, 1905, p. 12). This later self-analysis offers a heartbreaking lens through which we can re-evaluate his earlier, fictional exploration of hedonism and its dire consequences in *Dorian Gray*. The trials brought the simmering conflict between his aesthetic ideals, his private life, and rigid Victorian morality to a devastating and irreversible climax (Kaplan, 1989).

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY*

Oscar Wilde’s sole novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, unfolds like a rich, intricate tapestry where the threads of violence, aesthetics, and artifice are so deeply interwoven that they create a narrative both rooted in its time and eternally resonant with human nature. These central themes do not just drive the plot and characters; they also offer powerful insights into how Wilde’s own persona and his sharp critiques of society are reflected within the story.

MANIFESTATIONS OF VIOLENCE IN THE TEXT

The novel seethes with violence, a force that reaches far beyond simple physical acts, seeping into insidious psychological manipulation and profound moral degradation. These forms of violence are not isolated; they exist on a chilling continuum: Lord Henry Wotton’s psychological seduction sparks Dorian’s moral rot, which, in turn, deadens his conscience, making physical violence not just possible, but inevitable, culminating in his own horrific end.

• Psychological Violence is perhaps the most pervasive and subtly devastating force in the novel. Lord Henry Wotton's influence over Dorian Gray stands as a stark example. His dazzling, paradoxical, and hedonistic philosophy acts as a "slow-acting poison" (Manganiello, 1999, p. 32), gradually eroding Dorian's initial innocence and fundamentally reshaping his very way of seeing the world. Lord Henry effortlessly "charms" Dorian (Gomel, 2004, p. 76), expertly exploiting his youthful "innocence and insecurity" (Frankel, 1995, p. 45) with pronouncements designed to dismantle every conventional moral boundary. Early in their acquaintance, Lord Henry mesmerizes Dorian with a lecture on the supreme importance of youth and beauty, and the liberating wisdom of yielding to every temptation: "The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden to itself, with desire for what its monstrous laws have made monstrous and unlawful" (Wilde, 1891, Chapter 2). This intellectual seduction is a profound act of violence against Dorian's original, untainted spirit.

Dorian, in turn, becomes an expert inflicter of psychological cruelty, most strikingly upon Sibyl Vane. His cold, brutal rejection of her after her artistic brilliance seemingly wanes "You have killed my love. [...] Without your art, you are nothing" (Wilde, 1891, Chapter 7) strips her of her humanity, reducing her to a mere artistic function and directly causing her tragic suicide (Raby, 1988). Moreover, the magical portrait itself becomes a constant source of psychological torment for Dorian. His escalating obsession with, and revulsion at, the painting's grotesque transformations, which grotesquely mirror his own decaying soul, inflict an unending agony upon him –an inescapable, horrifying confrontation with his corrupted self (Manganiello, 1999).

• Moral Violence forms the dark core of Dorian's tragedy. His gradual corruption and descent into a life of "nameless sins" (Gomel, 2004, p. 79) and unrestrained, selfish pleasures devastate others' reputations and lives. This is a violence against the very moral fabric of his own soul and the society he inhabits (Manganiello, 1999). The portrait stands as the undeniable, chilling chronicle of this decay, with "the horrible lines that marred the painted features" and "the cruel sneer around the mouth" (Wilde, 1891, Chapter 10) screaming silently of his transgressions. The novel vividly explores the theme of "influence as immoral" (Raby, 1988, p. 121), not only through Lord Henry's impact on Dorian but also through Dorian's subsequent corrupting effect on numerous young men. This leads Basil to confront him with a heartbroken challenge: "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 speak to you, nor be seen with you?" (Wilde, 1891, Chapter 12).

• Physical Violence erupts as the terrifying climax of these deeper, internal violations. Dorian's murder of Basil Hallward is a brutal, desperate act, born from his inability to face the truth of his soul revealed by Basil's moral outrage and the undeniable evidence of the portrait (Manganiello, 1999). The scene of the murder is chillingly direct: "He rushed at him, and dug the knife

into the great vein that is behind the ear, crushing the man's head down on the table, and stabbing again and again" (Wilde, 1891, Chapter 13). The subsequent pursuit by James Vane, Sibyl's vengeful brother, introduces a direct physical threat to Dorian, though Vane's accidental death offers a temporary reprieve. Ultimately, Dorian's final, desperate act of violence is aimed at the very symbol of his corruption: in stabbing the portrait, he tries to annihilate the evidence of his soul's decay, but instead, he annihilates himself. He is found as "a dead man, in evening dress, with a knife in his heart. He was withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage" (Wilde, 1891, Chapter 20).

THE ROLE OF AESTHETICS AND ARTIFICE IN DORIAN'S CHARACTER ARC

Aesthetics and artifice are not just themes in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*; they are the very essence of Dorian Gray's being and the tragic trajectory of his life. Initially, Dorian embodies all that is aesthetically perfect: his extraordinary beauty makes him a living work of art, the ultimate muse for the painter Basil Hallward (Wilde, 1891, Chapter 1). He is depicted as a "young Adonis" and a "Narcissus" (Wilde, 1891, Chapter 1), effortlessly captivating everyone he encounters. Lord Henry Wotton actively encourages Dorian to live his life as if it were a grand work of art, prioritizing the relentless pursuit of new sensations and the worship of beauty above any ethical considerations (Raby, 1988). Dorian wholeheartedly embraces this philosophy, aiming for "experience itself, and not the fruits of experience, sweet or bitter as they may be" (Wilde, 1891, Chapter 4). This pursuit, however, is built on a fatal delusion: the separation of experience from its inevitable consequences.

The magical portrait stands as the novel's central piece of artifice. It begins as a breathtaking representation of Dorian's innocent youth but, through his fateful wish, becomes the grotesque repository of his moral and psychological decay, while he himself remains outwardly untouched by time or sin (Raby, 1988). The painting morphs into a "visible emblem of his conscience" (Raby, 1988, p. 120), a terrifying mirror reflecting the hideous ugliness of his soul. Dorian's relationship with the portrait shifts from adoration and fascination to utter revulsion and terror, driving him to hide it away in a desperate, futile attempt to conceal the truth of his inner life. This haunting dynamic vividly portrays his tortured relationship with his own conscience and the inescapable repercussions of his actions.

Despite Oscar Wilde's own prominent role in the Aesthetic Movement and his famous declarations about art's amorality, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* functions powerfully as a cautionary tale against an unrestrained aesthetic philosophy. The novel starkly illustrates the profound dangers of chasing beauty and pleasure without moral compass or empathy (Raby, 1988). Dorian's life, dedicated solely to aesthetic indulgence, ultimately leads to profound

unhappiness, crushing isolation, and violent self-destruction. Wilde himself, in a candid letter to the *St. James's Gazette*, acknowledged this very point, stating that the novel "is a story with a moral. And the moral is this: All excess, as well as all renunciation, brings its own punishment" (Wilde, 1891, "Mr. Oscar Wilde on 'Dorian Gray'"). This powerful admission underscores the novel's critique of an aestheticism devoid of self-awareness and ethical grounding. Dorian's tragedy is not his love for beauty, but his tragic failure to weave this pursuit with a developing moral sensibility. He yearns to freeze beauty and himself in an eternal, unchanging present, thereby tragically denying the dynamic, often painful process of human growth—a process that inevitably involves confronting the consequences of one's deeds.

The themes of artifice, masks, and constructed identity are deeply interwoven with Dorian's character. His life transforms into an elaborate performance of eternal youth and untarnished innocence, a beautiful mask expertly concealing the festering corruption within (Frankel, 1995). His public image is a meticulously maintained facade, a stark contrast to the "secret" life of degradation and "disgusting sins and abominable crimes" (Manganiello, 1999, p. 35) that he privately leads. The artifice of the portrait, initially intended to grant Dorian freedom from the natural tolls of aging and sin, ironically becomes his most agonizing prison and the ultimate instrument of his downfall. This subtle critique suggests a profound, perhaps even reluctant, skepticism within Wilde about the possibility of truly and permanently divorcing art, or an aestheticized life, from the unavoidable demands of moral accountability.

PERSONA MIRRORING

The concept of persona mirroring in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* transcends general thematic parallels, delving into specific instances where Oscar Wilde's own voice, experiences, and multifaceted identity seem to be directly, yet artfully, refracted through his characters. Wilde himself famously acknowledged this intricate authorial presence, famously stating: "Basil Hallward is what I think I am; Lord Henry, what the world thinks me; Dorian is what I would like to be—in other ages, perhaps" (Wilde, 1962, p. 288). This profound tripartite reflection forms a foundational understanding of how Wilde thoughtfully distributed fragments of his own persona throughout the novel's central figures.

CLOSE READINGS OF KEY PASSAGES FROM *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY*

Examining key passages reveals the intricate dance of this mirroring. Dorian Gray often embodies an idealized, or deeply conflicted, facet of Wilde himself. His initial state of innocence and profound susceptibility to influence

could reflect a younger, perhaps more impressionable Wilde, before he fully crafted his celebrated public armor or encountered his most damaging societal judgments. Dorian's relentless pursuit of new sensations and experiences, even those deemed morally questionable, mirrors a distinct Wildean intellectual and experiential curiosity. In his searing confession, *De Profundis*, Wilde revealed, "I deliberately went to the depths in the search for new sensation. What the paradox was to me in the sphere of thought, perversity became to me in the sphere of passion" (Wilde, 1905, p. 12). This powerful drive, in Dorian, becomes terrifyingly unleashed from any moral restraint or self-awareness. Consider, for instance, Dorian's obsessive fascination with the "poisonous" yellow book (often identified as Joris-Karl Huysmans' *À Rebours* (Frankel, 1995)). This book meticulously chronicles decadent sensations and profoundly influences his subsequent actions (Wilde, 1891, Chapters 10–11), serving as a fictional echo of Wilde's own intellectual explorations into the Decadent movement. Dorian's agonizing internal struggles with his ever-changing portrait and his tormented conscience (Gagnier, 1986) serve as a potent artistic externalization of the very internal conflicts Wilde himself likely experienced between his soaring aesthetic ideals, his personal desires, and the stifling moral framework of his era. When Dorian first gazes upon the completed portrait and utters his fateful wish, his exclamation, "It is part of myself!" (Wilde, 1891, Chapter 2) (Gomel, 2004, p. 77), signals an immediate and ultimately fatal identification with an externalized, idealized image of perfection. This act of narcissistic projection, actively encouraged by Lord Henry's enticing aesthetic philosophy, marks the tragic genesis of his downfall. It resonates deeply with Wilde's own complex and acutely self-aware relationship with his public image and the carefully curated perceptions he fostered.

Basil Hallward often serves as a reflection of Wilde the artist, or perhaps a more private, vulnerable aspect of Wilde's soul. Basil's poignant confession, "every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter", and his somber admission regarding Dorian's portrait, "I have put too much of myself into it" (Wilde, 1891, Chapter 1), directly articulate the profound, almost spiritual, connection between an artwork and the artist's innermost being and hidden emotions. This mirrors Wilde's own deep investment of his very self in his artistic creations. More specifically, Basil's profound "secret of his own soul"—his intense, almost worshipful, and clearly homoerotic adoration for Dorian is a powerful fictional representation of the agonizing struggles Wilde himself faced with his sexuality in a deeply repressive society (Bristow, 2007; Cohen, 1994). The acute fear that this deeply personal secret might be inadvertently revealed through his art is a potent undercurrent in the novel, chillingly reflecting the anxieties of an artist whose most guarded self could be betrayed by his own creative genius.

Lord Henry Wotton, with his dazzling torrent of witty, paradoxical, and often unsettlingly amoral epigrams, frequently echoes Wilde's celebrated public conversational style and the provocative philosophical ideas he explored

in his critical essays, such as those collected in *Intentions* (Wilde, 1913; Kiberd, 2000). Lord Henry's pronouncements often feel like Wildean aphorisms brought to life, sparkling with intellectual bravado. However, a crucial distinction emerges: Lord Henry largely remains a detached observer, a charming purveyor of theories, while Dorian is the one who tragically takes these philosophies to their literal, devastating conclusions. This dynamic could be seen as Wilde exploring the potential dangers or inherent limitations of his own intellectual provocations if they were to be adopted without the crucial balance of empathy or moral consideration. The tripartite reflection Wilde spoke of is not static; within the novel, it becomes a dynamic and ultimately tragic interplay. The "ideal" self (Dorian) is demonstrably corrupted by the influence of the "public" wit (Henry) and, in his corrupted state, chillingly ends up physically destroying the "artist" self (Basil). This narrative trajectory suggests a profound internal conflict, or perhaps a critical self-examination by Wilde, of how these different facets of a complex persona might destructively interact if not harmonized by a guiding moral compass.

COMPARISON OF QUOTATIONS FROM WILDE'S OTHER WRITINGS WITH NOVEL EXCERPTS

Juxtaposing passages from *The Picture of Dorian Gray* with Wilde's essays, letters, and even its own preface further illuminates this compelling persona mirroring.

From Wilde's essays, particularly those in *Intentions* (Wilde, 1913), many of Lord Henry's pronouncements find direct and striking parallels. For example, Vivian's central argument in "The Decay of Lying" that "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life" (Wilde, 1913, "The Decay of Lying") resonates powerfully with how Dorian's life becomes increasingly shaped and distorted by aesthetic ideals and the insidious influence of the "poisonous" yellow book. Similarly, Wilde's sophisticated discussions of the "mask" in his essays (Kohl, 1989), where he provocatively argues that the mask can be more truthful than the face, find a dark reflection in Dorian's chilling reliance on his unchanging physical beauty as a literal mask for his decaying, monstrous soul.

Wilde's letters, especially the profoundly personal *De Profundis*, written from the crucible of his imprisonment (Holland, 1962; Wilde, 1905), offer startlingly direct echoes of Dorian's grim trajectory. Dorian's descent into "senseless and sensual ease" and his exploration of "perversity... in the sphere of passion" are chillingly mirrored in Wilde's own raw confessions from Reading Gaol: "I let myself be lured into long spells of senseless and sensual ease. [...] Tired of being on the heights, I deliberately went to the depths in the search for new sensation. What the paradox was to me in the sphere of thought, perversity became to me in the sphere of passion" (Wilde, 1905, p. 12). Furthermore, Dorian's ultimate, albeit tragically belated, realization of his self-destruction and moral ruin

can be poignantly compared to Wilde's painful admission in *De Profundis*: "I forgot that every little action of the common day makes or unmakes character... I ceased to be lord over myself. I was no longer the captain of my soul, and did not know it. I allowed pleasure to dominate me" (Wilde, 1905, p. 19). The novel, penned years before the full unfolding of Wilde's personal tragedy, almost uncannily enacts the very dangers and moral consequences that he would later articulate with such raw, self-aware anguish. This suggests a remarkable, if perhaps subconscious, prescience in his artistic exploration of these profound themes.

Even the concise Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Wilde, 1891) provides rich material for this comparative analysis. Aphorisms such as "All art is at once surface and symbol. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril. Those who read the symbol do so at their peril" (Wilde, 1891, Preface) take on a grim, almost prophetic significance in relation to Dorian's fate. Dorian interacts intimately with the "symbol" of the portrait, dares to peer "beneath the surface" of his own soul as reflected in it, and indeed does so at his profound peril, ultimately leading to his tragic destruction. The provocative statement "Vice and virtue are to the artist materials for an art" (Wilde, 1891, Preface) is tragically enacted by Basil, who uses Dorian's beauty (a virtue) as his artistic material. But it is also, chillingly, enacted by Dorian himself, whose life, steeped in vice, becomes the horrifying "material" for the portrait's monstrous transformation and his own grim narrative.

CONCLUSION

Our journey through *The Picture of Dorian Gray* has endeavored to illuminate the intricate and multifaceted ways in which Oscar Wilde's vibrant persona—his lived experiences, intellectual formations, aesthetic philosophies, and profound moral paradoxes—is masterfully mirrored in the character of Dorian Gray and woven into the very architecture of the novel. From Wilde's formative years, shaped by an intellectually charged family and the contrasting philosophies of Ruskin and Pater, to his cultivation of a public dandy persona and his eventual devastating collision with Victorian morality, the threads of his complex life are deeply ingrained in the novel's fabric. The narrative's sustained exploration of psychological, moral, and physical violence, intertwined with its complex and ultimately cautionary engagement with aestheticism and artifice, serves as a resonant canvas for these powerful authorial reflections.

It can, therefore, be confidently reaffirmed that Oscar Wilde's persona is profoundly and artistically mirrored in Dorian Gray. This mirroring is not a simplistic biographical code; instead, it's a complex, refracted embodiment of Wilde's aesthetic ideals, his intellectual paradoxes, his cutting critique of Victorian societal hypocrisy, his personal anxieties—particularly those concerning hidden identities and the crushing weight of societal judgment—and the tragic potential inherent in the unbridled pursuit of sensation when divorced

from moral responsibility and empathetic human connection. The dynamic interplay of personality, violence, and aesthetics within the novel becomes the primary medium through which this intricate and often conflicted mirroring is achieved. The very “humanized” quality of the narrative, its enduring power to disturb and to fascinate, arguably stems from this resonant echo of its creator—a brilliant, flawed, and ultimately tragic figure whose vulnerabilities, contradictions, and perhaps even prophetic foresight are laid bare through the fictional life of Dorian Gray.

The implications of this analysis for Wilde studies are significant. Firstly, it offers a deeper understanding of Wilde not merely as a master of witty epigrams and aesthetic theories, but as a deeply serious artist wrestling with profound moral and psychological questions that resonate even today. Secondly, it strengthens the interpretation of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as a pivotal work that simultaneously champions and critiques the core tenets of the Aesthetic and Decadent movements (Raby, 1988). The novel acts as a potent social critique delivered from within the decadent framework itself, unmasking the potential for decay when aesthetic ideals lose their ethical moorings (Kohl, 1989).

Furthermore, this study underscores the critical importance of reading Wilde’s fiction in close conjunction with his essays, letters (especially *De Profundis*), and public pronouncements. This holistic approach allows us to appreciate the full spectrum of his thought and the often-painful evolution of his self-perception. The study of persona mirroring in *Dorian Gray* also enriches broader discussions within authorship theory. It showcases how an author can simultaneously reveal and conceal aspects of themselves, using fiction as a dynamic space for complex self-exploration, critique, and even prophetic insight (Gomel, 2004). Wilde’s work, seen through this lens, challenges simplistic notions of “the death of the author” by powerfully demonstrating the potent, albeit transformed and artistically mediated, presence of the authorial self within the textual world.

Ultimately, the novel’s chilling conclusion, where Dorian’s frantic attempt to destroy the physical symbol of his moral corruption—the portrait—results instead in his own hideous death and the portrait’s restoration to its original, pristine beauty, can be read as Wilde’s definitive statement on the inescapable nature of moral consequence. Regardless of aesthetic theories that might champion art’s autonomy or the elaborate public personas designed to deflect judgment, the moral reality of one’s actions, Wilde seems to suggest, will eventually assert itself. This carries profound implications for understanding Wilde’s own complex and evolving relationship with his “Art for Art’s Sake” philosophy, hinting at an underlying awareness that beauty, however captivating, cannot ultimately mask or negate the fundamental truths of the human soul. The enduring fascination with *The Picture of Dorian Gray* likely lies in this deeply human and resonant echo of its creator, whose complexities continue to challenge and engage readers, prompting timeless reflection on identity, morality, and the seductive, often perilous, power of art.

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Наташа М. САРАФОВА

АУТОРОВ ЕСТЕТСКИ ОДЈЕК И СЕНКА НАСИЉА:
ЛИК ОСКАРА ВАЈЛДА У ОДРАЗУ ПРОТАГОНИСТЕ РОМАНА
СЛИКА ДОРИЈАНА ГРЕЈА

Резиме

Овај рад заступа тезу да се сложена личност Оскара Вајлда, као таписерија саткана од његовог ирског порекла, класичног образовања, естетских филозофија, борбе са друштвеним осудама и дубоких моралних нејасноћа, уметнички и слојевито одражава у лику Доријана Греја. Кроз суптилно испитивање личности, свеобухватне сенке насиља (психолошког, моралног и физичког) и заводљиве привлачности естетизма у роману *Слика Доријана Греја*, овај есеј показује да дело није тек обично огледало Вајлда, већ жив и критички дијалог са сложеним и често контрадикторним аспектима његовог идентитета, као и са снажним друштвеним притисцима којима је био изложен. Јасним дефинисањем кључних појмова као што су личност, насиље, естетика и ауторско одражавање, као и детаљним анализама романа у паралели са осталим Вајлдовим списима, овај рад открива како Доријан Греј у себи носи Вајлдове интелектуалне и моралне парадоксе, те на крају функционише као снажна и узнемирујућа опомена о деструктивном путу неограниченог естетизма.

Кључне речи: Оскар Вајлд, *Слика Доријана Греја*, естетизам, личност, ауторско одражавање, насиље, морална нејасноћа, викторијанска књижевност, ауторство.

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