



The Representation Of Psychological Disorders In The Picture Of Dorian Gray By Oscar Wilde

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the representation of psychological disorders in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. It aims to analyze key psychological dimensions of the protagonist, including narcissistic traits, moral corruption, and identity fragmentation. Using qualitative textual analysis, the study explores how aesthetic philosophy and the pursuit of eternal youth contribute to Dorian Gray’s psychological transformation. The findings suggest that his obsession with beauty results in progressive moral disengagement and the development of a divided self, symbolized through the contrast between his unchanging appearance and the deteriorating portrait. The study concludes that Wilde’s novel offers a profound psychological insight into the consequences of excessive desire and moral detachment.

Keywords:

narcissism, identity fragmentation, moral corruption, aestheticism, psychological analysis, Oscar Wilde

Introduction

Literary studies have long engaged with psychological interpretation as a means of understanding identity, morality, and human desire¹. One of the most significant works in this context is *The Picture of Dorian Gray*² by Oscar Wilde³, which explores the psychological consequences of aestheticism and moral transgression.

Written in the late nineteenth century, the novel reflects the influence of aesthetic philosophy, emphasizing beauty and sensory experience over ethical responsibility. Through the character of Dorian Gray, Wilde constructs a psychological case study of an individual whose obsession with youth and appearance leads to internal conflict and moral decline. The contrast between Dorian’s unchanged physical form and

the increasingly corrupted portrait symbolizes a divided identity.

This article therefore analyzes the psychological dimensions of Dorian Gray, focusing on narcissistic tendencies, identity fragmentation, and moral deterioration.

Main Body

1. Psychological Deterioration and Aesthetic Influence

Dorian Gray’s psychological decline is shaped by extreme aestheticism and hedonistic values, which gradually replace moral judgment with sensory gratification. His fixation on eternal youth transforms beauty into a destructive force that governs his identity and behavior.

2. Narcissistic Traits and Emotional Detachment

¹ Aras, G. (2015). Personality and Individual Differences: Literature in Psychology—Psychology in Literature. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 185, 250–257. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.03.452>

²Wikipedia contributors. (2026). *The picture of Dorian Gray*. Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dorian_Gray

³ Wikipedia contributors. (2026). *Oscar wilde*. Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oscar_Wilde

Dorian can be interpreted as a representation of narcissistic personality traits⁴. His obsession with appearance, fear of aging, and belief in the supremacy of beauty over morality reflect core narcissistic features.

Psychological interpretations suggest that extreme narcissism is often associated with emotional instability and self-destructive tendencies⁵. Dorian's grandiose self-perception leads him to believe that physical beauty exempts him from moral accountability.

This detachment becomes evident in his response to *Sibyl Vane's* suicide, where he interprets tragedy aesthetically rather than emotionally. Such reactions indicate a decline in empathy and increasing psychological imbalance.

3. Identity Fragmentation and the Divided Self

A central psychological dimension of the novel is the fragmentation of identity. The portrait functions as a symbolic representation of Dorian's inner self, while his physical appearance remains socially acceptable.

This division produces a false self, enabling him to conceal immoral behavior while repressing internal guilt. The portrait gradually reflects his psychological and moral corruption, representing the hidden consequences of his actions.

4. Morel Breakdown and Antisocial Features

As the narrative progresses, Dorian exhibits increasing emotional detachment and lack of remorse, characteristics often associated with antisocial behavior. His inability to experience guilt reflects a weakening moral consciousness. The murder of Basil Hallward marks the peak of this psychological decline, demonstrating complete moral disengagement and self-preservation at the expense of others.

5. Paranoia and Internal Conflict

⁴ Tjokro, M. (2002). *An analysis of the change of character traits of the main male character Dorian Gray caused by narcissistic personality disorder in Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Bachelor's thesis, Petra Christian University). Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/39736748>

⁵ Mansyur, S. A., Sunra, L., & Baa, S. (2025). Genetic structuralism study on *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde. *Eurasian Journal of English Language and Literature*, 7(2), 78–95. <https://izlik.org/JA88BD82YA>

Despite his attempts to suppress guilt, Dorian becomes increasingly preoccupied with the portrait, which symbolizes his hidden conscience. This obsession generates anxiety and psychological instability. The tension between pleasure-seeking impulses and suppressed moral awareness creates ongoing internal conflict, contributing to his psychological deterioration.

Furthermore, some interpretations of the novel associate Dorian Gray with what is sometimes referred to as the "Dorian Gray syndrome,"⁶ a concept describing an excessive preoccupation with youth and physical appearance. While not a clinically recognized disorder, this idea reflects the novel's broader psychological theme of destructive aesthetic obsession. Dorian's relentless pursuit of beauty and pleasure ultimately results in emotional emptiness and psychological collapse.

6. External Influence and Hedonistic Ideology

External influence, particularly Lord Henry's philosophy, plays a crucial role in shaping Dorian's psychological transformation. Lord Henry introduces hedonistic ideas⁷ that normalize pleasure-seeking and discourage moral reflection.

Hedonism functions as a behavioral regulator, where pleasure becomes the dominant motivational force, weakening long-term ethical reasoning and self-control. This influence intensifies Dorian's latent psychological vulnerabilities rather than creating them.

7. Symbolic Collapse of the Self

Dorian's attempt to destroy the portrait represents the final stage of psychological breakdown. This act symbolizes a rejection of conscience; however, it ultimately leads to self-destruction, reinforcing the idea that moral

⁶ Ambalal, S. M., Monga, V., & Kashyap, R. (2023).

Exploring the Dorian Gray trait: Unveiling the complexities of perceived aging and self-image. *Cureus*.

<https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.47326>

⁷ Nadvinichna, T. L., & Babiar, O. V. (2026). The psychological content of the hedonistic orientation of the personality. *Psychology and Society*, 1, 155–164. <https://doi.org/10.35774/pis2026.01.155>

denial cannot eliminate psychological consequences.

Conclusion

The Picture of Dorian Gray presents a profound psychological exploration of identity, desire, and moral collapse. Dorian Gray's transformation illustrates how narcissistic traits, emotional detachment, and identity fragmentation lead to psychological disintegration.

The novel demonstrates that the separation between external appearance and internal morality is ultimately unsustainable. Dorian's pursuit of aesthetic perfection, combined with the rejection of moral responsibility, results in progressive psychological deterioration and self-destruction.

Wilde's work therefore serves as a cautionary psychological narrative, emphasizing that the denial of conscience and unchecked hedonism inevitably lead to the collapse of the self.

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