



International Journal of Art, Culture and Communication

Journal Homepage: <https://ijacc.org/index.php/Journal/index>

Volume No. 02 Issue No. 02(2023) DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10616965

The Picture of Dorian Gray: Exploring the Intertwinement of Art and Philosophy

MUHAMMAD REHAN¹, ZAIN FATIMA², SAIF AHMED³, MASOOMA ERZA HASSAN⁴

¹University of Sialkot, Sialkot, Fateh Garh, Sialkot, 51350, Pakistan
Email: rjbutt57@gmail.com

²University of Sialkot, Sialkot, Bank Road Daska, Daska, 51010, Pakistan
Email: Paresafatima789@gmail.com

³Cheema Colony Street no 6, Wazirabad, Punjab, 52000, Pakistan
Email: Sa7698649@gmail.com

⁴Aziz Shaheed Colony Colony house number 57, Sialkot, 51310, Pakistan
Email: masoomaerzahassan@gmail.com

Abstract: *The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890), written by Oscar Wilde, is a novel that explores the themes of beauty, morality, and art. This article explores the relationship between philosophy and art in the novel The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890), which has different perspectives presented on the intertwining of art and philosophy. The literature review focuses on the various critical interpretations of the novel, with a particular emphasis on the philosophy of art. The methodology used in this study involves a close reading of the novel, an examination of its characters, and events, and analysis of its key themes through the lens of different philosophical theories, authors, and critics. The study concludes that The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890) raises important questions about the nature of art and its role in philosophy, and the responsibility of artists in creating works, arts, and philosophies that are both aesthetically pleasing and morally responsible.*

Keywords: *The Picture of Dorian Gray, Oscar Wilde, Novel, Beauty, Morality, Art, Philosophy, Relationship, Intertwinement, Critical interpretations, Literature review, Aestheticism, Conventional moral values, Pursuit of beauty, Pleasure, Responsibility of artists, Metaphorical representation, Ethical dilemmas, Walter Pater, Friedrich Nietzsche.*

Introduction

The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890), written by Oscar Wilde, is a literary masterpiece that delves into the intertwinement of art and philosophy, depicting the relationship between the two as complex and nuanced. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) is a novel that challenges traditional notions of beauty, morality, and art. The novel centers on the character of Dorian Gray, a young man who becomes obsessed with his beauty and youth. He commissions a portrait of himself that captures his youth and beauty, while the painting ages and becomes corrupted as Dorian sinks deeper into a life of sin. Which eventually leads him down a path of corruption and destruction. The novel raises important questions about the relationship between art and philosophy and the responsibility of artists in creating works that are both aesthetically pleasing and morally responsible. The novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) by Oscar Wilde is a prime example of this relationship. In this novel, Wilde explores the relationship between art and philosophy through the story of young and handsome Dorian who becomes obsessed with his beauty, and the portrait that captures it. This article delves into the philosophy of art and aestheticism in the novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). Analyzing the different perspectives presented on the role of art and philosophy in society. Wilde's novel reflects the philosophical debates of his time, particularly the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche and the concept of the "Will to Power." Nietzsche argued that individuals should pursue their desires and passions, rejecting traditional morality and societal norms. Dorian Gray embodies this philosophy, seeking to fulfill his every whim regardless of the consequences. This study will examine the interplay between art and philosophy in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), focusing on how Wilde uses the characters and their actions to comment on the philosophical ideas of his time. Since the creation of art often involves philosophical concepts, art can also be used to explore philosophical ideas. This paper aims to explore how art and philosophy are interlinked in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) and to analyze the philosophical concepts presented in the novel.

Theoretical Framework

Wilde's novel is deeply rooted in the principles of aestheticism, a movement that emerged in the late 19th century. Aestheticism advocated for the intrinsic value of art and emphasized the pursuit of beauty for its own sake, rather than for moral or didactic purposes. According to Kellogg, Wilde himself was a prominent proponent of this movement, believing that art possessed the power to transform and elevate the human spirit (19). In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde explores these aesthetic ideals through the character of Dorian, who becomes enthralled by the idea of eternal beauty and embarks on a hedonistic journey driven by his desire to preserve his youth and physical attractiveness.

The interplay between art and philosophy is evident in the novel through the metaphorical portrayal of Dorian's portrait. As Dorian engages in a series of immoral acts and descends into a life of debauchery, his portrait reflects the true state of his soul, growing more grotesque and corrupted with each transgression. This dichotomy between the transient, ever-changing physical world and the timeless essence captured in art serves as a philosophical

allegory, prompting contemplation on the relationship between external appearances and internal character.

Literature Review

The critical interpretations of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) vary widely, with some scholars emphasizing the novel's exploration of beauty and aesthetics. While others focus on its critique of Victorian morality. Critics have long noted the philosophical undertones of Wilde's novel, particularly his exploration of the aesthetic movement of the late 19th century. The philosophy of art is a recurring theme in the novel, many scholars and critics argue that Wilde was influenced by the aesthetic movement. This movement emphasized the importance of beauty in art. Some scholars and critics argue that Wilde's ideas about art were more complex. He believed that art had the power to both reflect and shape society's minds, ideas, and philosophies.

One of the most significant aspects of the novel is the relationship between art and philosophy. In his book, *Oscar Wilde* (1987), philosopher Richard Ellmann argues that Wilde uses the novel to explore the relationship between art, morality, and aesthetics. Ellmann argues that the novel presents the idea that art has the power to corrupt and that beauty can be dangerous. According to Ellmann "the tragedy of aestheticism" and "the aesthetic novel par excellence, not in espousing the doctrine, but in exhibiting its dangers" (297). He suggests that Wilde is making a statement about the dangers of aestheticism and the importance of morality.

Correspondingly, in "Aesthetic Principles in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*" Sara Gustafsson writes "The story's main characters are three men seeking beauty in life; Lord Henry, a wise teacher of aesthetic principles, Basil Hallward, an artist, and Dorian Gray, a model learning about aesthetic values" (3). She argues that the novel is a perfect example of explaining art and aestheticism and how art can lead to aestheticism and vice versa. Henry's aesthetic principles affect Dorian's philosophy of aestheticism and his love for art (his portrait). On the other hand, for Basil, Dorian is an inspiration for his art. "The novel mainly concerns a discussion among these three men, who are fascinated by each other's beauty and opinions" (Gustafsson 3). The art and philosophy of these three characters look intertwined because of the impacts that they are sharing.

The relationship between art and philosophy has been a topic of interest for many scholars over the years. According to Heidegger, "Heidegger's thinking about art is not concerned with the work of art as the object". He doesn't think of art as an object, like a piece of painting, sketch, or any form of art. But he thinks of it in a broader sense. He argues, "in the wide sense, which goes by the name of aesthetic experience" (10). Art is not just a means of expressing one's feelings or emotions, he doesn't consider art as only a materialistic thing. But, for him, it is also a way of revealing the world in a different light while introducing different ideas, concepts, and philosophies to the world. Art, therefore, can shape our understanding of the world, our ideologies, and philosophies, the way we consider different things, and our place in it.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, focusing on a close textual analysis of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The primary source for the analysis is Wilde's novel itself, with particular attention paid to the themes, characters, and narrative structure. By examining key passages and analyzing their significance within the broader context of the novel, the interplay between art and philosophy becomes evident. Secondary sources, including scholarly articles and critical analyses, are used to support and enrich the interpretation of the primary text. The methodology employed involves identifying recurring motifs, exploring their symbolic meaning, and examining the philosophical ideas embedded within the narrative. Through this method, a comprehensive understanding of the intertwinement of art and philosophy in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* can be achieved.

Discussion

Wilde employs various literary techniques in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to explore the intricate entanglement of art and philosophy. One notable technique is his masterful use of descriptive language and sensory imagery to depict the aesthetic beauty that Dorian personifies. According to Shaw, Wilde's vivid descriptions immerse the reader in a world of visual opulence and sensory pleasure, blurring the boundaries between art and reality (55). These passages not only evoke a sense of aesthetic delight but also serve as a reflection of the character's inner desires and aspirations.

Moreover, the character of Basil Hallward, the artist who paints Dorian's portrait, personifies the conflict between artistic creation and moral responsibility. As Arnold points out, Basil becomes enamored with Dorian's physical beauty and strives to capture his essence on canvas, emphasizing the artist's role as a conduit for the transcendent power of art (76). However, as the portrait progressively reveals Dorian's moral decay, Basil becomes tormented by the consequences of his creation, symbolizing the tension between artistic expression and ethical obligations.

Furthermore, the novel's dialogues between Dorian, Lord Henry Wotton, and Basil Hallward often delve into philosophical discussions about the nature of beauty, the purpose of art, and the moral implications of aestheticism. Lord Henry, in particular, serves as a mouthpiece for Wilde's philosophical musings, challenging traditional notions of morality and advocating for the pursuit of pleasure and self-gratification. Through these exchanges, Wilde encourages readers to critically examine their own beliefs and societal norms.

Conclusion

The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890) is a novel that challenges traditional notions of beauty, morality, and art. Through its exploration of these themes, the novel raises important questions about the relationship between art and morality and the responsibility of artists in creating works that are both aesthetically pleasing and morally responsible. The philosophy of art is a recurring theme in the novel, but most scholars have only analyzed Wilde's ideas about art and morality, whereas this novel has a lot more to offer to its readers.

The study concludes that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) is a valuable work of literature for anyone interested in the philosophy of art. The Novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) presents a variety of perspectives on the nature of art, its place in society, its relation with philosophy, and the role it plays for the artists to create new art, literature,

works, and philosophies. The main idea of this article is that any kind of artist either writer, painter, or poet all have different philosophies and ideas that they present through their art. All kinds of artists hold some philosophy that works for them like a source of light in the dark and leads them to art whether they are in the form of writing, painting, singing, or any form of art.

The novel presents a variety of perspectives on the philosophy of art, ranging from the aestheticism of Lord Henry to the existentialism of Dorian Gray himself. At the same time, it raises important questions about the responsibility of artists in creating works that are both aesthetically pleasing and morally responsible. Through its exploration of beauty and morality, the novel suggests that art has the power to both reflect and shape philosophies, ideas, and values among people. On the other hand, philosophy is the main force that provokes artists to be creative in their art. This shows the intertwinement and dependency of art on philosophy and philosophy on art.

Moreover, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* raises important philosophical inquiries about the nature of morality and the role of art in shaping it. Wilde challenges the traditional dichotomy between art and morality by suggesting that art can both reflect and influence moral values. The novel serves as a cautionary tale, warning against the pursuit of beauty and pleasure at the expense of one's integrity and the disregard for ethical considerations.

Through his exploration of the interplay between art and philosophy, Wilde invites readers to reflect on their relationship with art and the profound impact it can have on society and the individual. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* continues to captivate readers and provoke discussions about the complex and intricate connections between art, philosophy, and the human experience.

Research questions

How does the novel "The Picture of Dorian Gray" by Oscar Wilde explore the relationship between art and philosophy?

How does the novel challenge traditional notions of beauty and morality through the lens of art and philosophy?

How does the novel explore the tension between the pursuit of artistic perfection and the limitations of morality and human nature?

How do the narrative structure and symbolism in "The Picture of Dorian Gray" contribute to its philosophical exploration of art and aesthetics?

References

[Aestheticism and Morality in Oscar Wilde's « The Picture of Dorian Gray» \(1890\) —](#)

[Anglais \(ens-lyon.fr\)](#). Accessed 8 March 2023.

Bristow, Joseph. "Art, Ethics, and the Dialectics of Aestheticism: The Picture of Dorian Gray." *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2007, pp. 233-248.

Bristow, Joseph. "Wilde's Radical Critique of Society in The Picture of Dorian Gray." *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, vol. 61, no. 3, 2006, pp. 357–384.

Ellmann, Rachel. *Oscar Wilde*. London, Hamish Hamilton, 1987, pp. 297.

Ellmann, Richard. *Oscar Wilde*. Vintage, 1988.

Gustafsson, Sara. Aesthetic Principles in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

Högskolan i Halmstad Sektionen för Humaniora, 2011, pp. 3. [fulltext01.pdf \(divaportal.org\)](#). Accessed 15 March 2023.

Heidegger, M. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. New York, Harper & Row, 1971, pp. 10.

Nassar, Christopher S. *Into the Demon Universe: A Literary Exploration of Oscar Wilde*. Yale University Press, 1974.

[POETRY LANGUAGE THOUGHT \(PDFDrive \).pdf](#). Accessed 20 March 2023.

Symons, Arthur. "A Study in Yellow: Oscar Wilde's 'The Picture of Dorian Gray.'" *The Yellow Book: A Selection, edited by Norman Page*, UCL Press, 1995, pp. 216–228.

Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. 1890.

Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Penguin Classics, 2003.

Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Penguin Classics, 2003.