

SOME ANALYTICAL VIEWS ON THE NOVEL “THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY”

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Annotatsiya: Bu ijodiy ish “Dorian Greyning Portreti” romanini yaqindan tahlil qilish orqali yaratilgan. Men ushbu romanni Adabiyot kursida mustaqil ta’lim sifatida o’qiganman. Ushbu maqolaning maqsadi romanning syujeti, qahramonlari va asosiy mavzularini baholashdan iborat. Ish MLA formatida tuzilgan.

Аннотация: Это работа создана на основе тщательного анализа «Портрета Дориана Грея». Я прочитал этот роман в качестве самостоятельного изучения на курсе литературы. Цель данной статьи – дать оценку сюжету, персонажам и основным темам романа. Работа составлена в формате MLA.

Key words: portrait, artist, physical beauty, eternal youth, the Victorian Era, morality, vanity, hypocrisy, hedonism, decadence, self-indulgence

1. INTRODUCTION

The piece of literature that will be discussed and analyzed in this article is “The Picture of Dorian Gray”. Written in 1891, “The Picture of Dorian Gray” is the only novel composed by Oscar Wilde, an Irish writer. Oscar Wilde was born in Dublin on October 16, 1854. He is regarded as the leader of the aesthetic movement. This novel is dedicated to the immortal theme of morality, love and hatred, as well as physical and spiritual beauty. Oscar Wilde, who was well known for his wit, used this controversial work to explore his ideas about art, beauty, morality, and love.

2. MAIN PART

The novel was set in the Victorian Era and, therefore, it bears numerous societal norms of that period. The core of the book deals with the discrepancy between the public exterior of the Victorian community and its hidden interior, which includes disguised desires, extravagances, and immoralities. Through the character of Dorian Gray, the novel explores the hypocrisy and repression of the era. Initially, Dorian is described as a handsome adult with a pure soul, but his portrait which grows old and bears the signs of his sins acts as a mirror of his hidden personality. Dorian's pursuit of hedonistic pleasures and neglecting moral standards tend to show the darker side of Victorian society. Moreover, the novel analyzes the impact of aestheticism – a movement that mainly appreciated beauty and art and often overlooked the moral and religious norms of the time. Lord Henry Wotton, one of the novel's protagonists, is a proponent of aestheticism who leads Dorian down the path of corruption and pleasure, finally causing his downfall. The short summary of the book is as follows: Lord Henry visits his friend Basil who is painting Dorian's portrait. Henry praises Dorian's beauty. When Dorian sees the finished portrait, he wishes that he could stay forever young and the picture would grow older in place of him. He would give his soul for this. His wish is granted magically. Dorian falls in love with an actress called Sibyl Vane. She does not know his name, and calls him ‘Prince Charming’. Dorian tells his friends they will marry. When Henry and Basil go with Dorian to watch Sibyl's act, she performs terribly in front of them. As a result, Dorian breaks off their engagement. When he gets home, he finds an ugly line in Basil's portrait. Cruelty is now visible in a painted face. Becoming heartbroken, Sibyl commits suicide. Dorian locks the portrait in the upper room where no one can see its transformation. He enters the extended period of self-indulgent, decadent and scandalous acts as years pass. On the evening before his 38th birthday, Basil comes and warns Dorian about the rumors circulating about him. Dorian leads his friend to show the portrait. Basil gets horrified by its monstrous ugliness. Basil urges Dorian to repent for his sins, but Dorian says it is too late for repentance. Suddenly overcome by anger, Dorian wants to kill Basil. He takes a knife, and stabs Basil several times to death. Dorian contacts Alan Campbell, his former friend to get rid of Basil's dead body. One day, James Vane who wants to kill Dorian for causing his sister's death encounters him. When Dorian shows the man his youthful face, James concludes that he could not be Dorian. James apologizes and lets Dorian go. Dorian decides to change his life and destroy his portrait. Dorian stabs his portrait, tears it and falls to the floor. When servants enter the room, they see Basil's portrait of Dorian, which is once again young and beautiful. An ugly, wrinkled man lies near the portrait, and it turns out to be Dorian Gray.

Evaluation

Analysis of the main characters

Despite having a large plot, there is only a handful of characters participating in the novel. Five main characters play the main roles throughout the narrative. They are Dorian Gray, Basil Hallward, Lord Henry Wotton, Sibyl Vane, and James Vane. We can also encounter other characters like Alan Campbell, Mrs. Leaf, and Francis who perform secondary roles.

1. Dorian Gray – the protagonist of the novel. In general, the entire novel is dedicated to Dorian’s life, starting from his meeting with Basil Hallward till his tragic death. Dorian is described as a young, handsome, and wealthy adult at the beginning of the novel. When Basil encounters him for the first time, Dorian’s beauty catches his artistic imagination. What is more, Lord Henry is also impressed at the beauty Dorian possesses. Dorian’s personality starts to change after meeting Lord Henry who urges Dorian to take advantage of his youthful appearance. After the conversation with Lord Henry, Dorian realizes that his youth and beauty are not permanent. Therefore, he wishes his portrait to grow old in place of him, and he stays always young and beautiful. The wish is granted, and Dorian pursues a libertine life of varied and amoral experiences while staying young and beautiful; meanwhile, his painting ages, and every sin he commits takes its toll on it. Over the 18 years, Dorian lives a life of Hedonism by seeking pleasure and entertaining himself. He murders Basil in a fit of rage which shows his inevitable decadence. In the end, Dorian’s personality grows so shallow that he cannot resist destroying his portrait. He finds tragic death since he could not establish and follow his own moral standards.

2. Basil Hallward – an artist who paints Dorian’s portrait. He is the only character in the novel who never commits any sins. He always tries to restrain Dorian from immoral acts, and never does any harm to other people. He is concerned with a good reputation and character, but also with creating and capturing Beauty. In the Preface of the book, Wilde regards an artist as the creator of beautiful things. This claim is well matched to Basil since he aims to depict every single beauty of life on paper.

3. Lord Henry Wotton – a critic who explains Beauty, Life, and Arts in a way that fundamentally changes Dorian’s outlook. Basil may capture Dorian’s beauty on canvas, but Henry explains it in a way that awakens Dorian to its significance. Wilde mentions in his Preface that the critic is he who can translate into another manner or a new material his impression of beautiful things. Henry is a cynical dandy who lives with his life on display to the world and dedicated to pleasure. He prefers to put his theories about pleasure seeking into action on other people. It is clear to him that the experimental method is the only method by which one can arrive at any scientific analysis of the passions, and certainly Dorian Gray seems to promise rich and fruitful results in this analysis.

4. Sibyl Vane – Dorian’s primary love interest who is a symbolic character. She is young and poor. She acts in the theatre because she really needs to escape her reality through acting. Once Dorian loves her, her performances suffer as she no longer needs acting to escape her reality. Sadly, she lives in vain, dying young at the age of seventeen. Dorian loves her only because of her beautiful ability to act. Eventually, she commits suicide after being rejected by Dorian Gray.

5. James Vane – Sibyl’s protective young brother. He distrusts the aristocratic suitor whom Sibyl and their mother know as “Prince Charming”. James vows to kill like a dog if he ever harms Sibyl. He joins the navy and leaves for Australia just before Dorian causes Sibyl’s death by breaking up their relationship. Some years later, James returns to England to find his only sister dead. He starts searching for Dorian to kill him. Once he finds Dorian on the street at night, Dorian cheats him by showing his youthful face. Dorian points out that he is much too young to be the person whom James is seeking. Realizing he has been tricked, James returns to kill Dorian but manages to be in the wrong place and at the wrong time. He is accidentally shot by one of Dorian’s guests during the hunting party.

“The Picture of Dorian Gray” is famous for its vivid and complex characters, particularly the protagonist, Dorian Gray, and his fellows like Lord Henry Wotton and Basil Hallward. Wilde’s characters are created with authenticity, each possessing unique traits, desires, and motivations. Dorian Gray himself is a fascinating character who undergoes a profound change throughout the novel, from an innocent and handsome young man to a corrupted and morally bankrupt individual. Lord Henry serves as a cynical and intellectually provocative influence on Dorian, encouraging him to accept a hedonistic lifestyle and pursue pleasure more than anything. Basil Hallward represents the moral conscience and artistic integrity that Dorian gradually discards in favor of indulgence and self-pleasure. His genuine affection for Dorian and his disillusionment with the changes in his friend highlight the novel’s exploration of the corrupting influence of society and individual desires.

The core concept presented in “The Picture of Dorian Gray” — the notion of a portrait aging and reflecting the moral consequences of its subject’s deeds while the subject remains youthful and unaffected — is truly unique to Oscar Wilde’s novel. Though similar themes concerning moral decay and accountability for one’s actions can be identified in other literary works, Wilde’s specific exploration of this concept stands out. Some readers perceive Dorian Gray’s portrait shouldering the weight of his transgressions as a warning against moral decline and the pursuit of shallow pleasures. Alternatively, it can be interpreted as a critique of societal hypocrisy and the inevitability of facing consequences.

Themes

Appearance versus reality – Oscar Wilde engages the theme of appearance versus reality in several ways. When Dorian’s portrait is first displayed, appearance and reality are synchronized. However, they begin to diverge as soon as Lord Henry awakens Dorian to his beauty vanity that his portrait would age in his place. Also, Sibyl Vane – the great love of Dorian’s life – is an actress devoted to appearing to be something other than what she is. Before Dorian, she was skilled at acting because she believed love had no place in her life. Once Dorian changes her reality through loving her, she can no longer encompass the characters that she used to play so well. Art versus life – closely related to the theme of appearance and reality as the theme of art for Wilde requires style, conscious display, and elevated aesthetic quality. It should be beautiful. When Sibyl loses her artistic ability, she loses Dorian. This makes it immediately clear that Dorian loved her because of her art. Art supersedes life here. Lord Henry also argues repeatedly for the power and superiority of art. When Sibyl dies, he urges Dorian to think of her death as an artful, literary tragedy. Dorian accepts this guidance, moving from mourning and back to pleasure. Art then consoles in this novel just as it reshapes reality. Reputation versus character – reputation is the story others tell about a person. Character is that person’s real nature. “The Picture of Dorian Gray: examines what happens when there is a collision at their intersection. Many people hear stories about Dorian; his bad reputation precedes him, yet because so many believe one’s character affects one’s features. Anyone who sees Dorian rejects the bad stories about him because of his pleasing physical appearance.

"The Picture of Dorian Gray" contains several hidden assumptions that should be analyzed. These assumptions are not explicitly stated but are implicit in the portrayal of characters, events, and moral dilemmas throughout the novel. One hidden assumption is that beauty, particularly physical beauty, holds great power and influence over individuals and society. The novel suggests that society's obsession with beauty can lead to moral corruption and superficiality, as seen in Dorian Gray's descent into hedonism and vanity. To catch this hidden assumption, one should read the book till its end. Another hidden assumption is that the pursuit of pleasure, especially at the expense of morality and ethical principles. It turns out to be ultimately destructive. While pleasure-seeking is depicted as alluring and seductive in the novel, it is also portrayed as shallow and ultimately unsatisfying, leading to spiritual decay and moral degradation.

The novel assumes that art has the power to reveal truths about human nature and society. Dorian Gray's portrait serves as a mirror of the hidden aspects of his soul, reflecting his moral decay and inner corruption. This assumption underscores the importance of art as a vehicle for self-expression and introspection. Oscar Wilde mentions in the Preface of his book that art’s main aim is to reveal art and conceal the artist.

The illusion of youth: "The Picture of Dorian Gray" implies that youth and beauty are transient and illusory, masking the true nature of the individual underneath. Dorian's desire for eternal youth is depicted as a futile quest, highlighting the inevitability of aging and the impermanence of physical beauty.

Response

The morals and ideals of Victorian society are strongly criticized in “The Picture of Dorian Gray”. Wilde disagrees with the idea that looks and social status are more important than being decent, rational and good mannered. He shows how the people in the top class lie about being good while doing all kinds of bad things behind closed doors. The book also makes you think about what beauty is and how it relates to right or wrong. The fact that Dorian is beautiful is both a gift and a curse. People are drawn to him because of it, but it also cuts him off from the rest of society. Dorian’s obsession with his beauty makes him do all kinds of bad things, and he becomes more and more cut off from the rest of the world. Wilde mentions that beauty can be dangerous if it is not paired with justice and goodness.

Oscar Wilde's "The Picture of Dorian Gray" is a novel that offers profound insights into human nature, morality, and the consequences of vanity and hedonism. However, like any work, it's subject to analysis and critique. Here are some aspects where Wilde excels and where there may be room for criticism:

What Oscar Wilde Gets Right:

1. Exploration of morality: Wilde adeptly explores the complex nature of morality and the consequences of immoral behavior. Through the character of Dorian Gray, he delves into themes such as the conflict between appearance and reality, the nature of sin and guilt, and the corrupting influence of aestheticism.
2. Characterization: The characters in the novel are vividly drawn and memorable. Dorian Gray, in particular, undergoes a fascinating transformation from an innocent and idealistic young man to a morally corrupt and decadent figure. Lord Henry's wit and aphorisms add depth to the narrative, while Basil Hallward serves as a moral compass and tragic figure.
3. Language and style: Wilde's prose is elegant, witty, and filled with memorable aphorisms and epigrams. His use of language contributes to the novel's timeless appeal and reinforces its themes of beauty, art, and the human condition.

4. Exploration of Aestheticism: "The Picture of Dorian Gray" is often considered an essential work of the aesthetic movement, which prioritizes beauty and sensory experience above all else. Wilde effectively explores the allure and dangers of aestheticism, highlighting its potential for both artistic transcendence and moral corruption.

Areas for critique:

1. Character development: While Dorian Gray undergoes a dramatic transformation throughout the novel, some critics argue that other characters, such as Lord Henry and Sibyl Vane, are less fully developed. Lord Henry, in particular, remains somewhat enigmatic, with his motivations and beliefs left ambiguous.
2. Moralizing tone: At times, Wilde's moralizing tone and didacticism can feel heavy-handed, particularly in the latter parts of the novel where he explicitly spells out the consequences of Dorian's actions. Some readers may find this approach less effective than a more subtle exploration of the novel's themes.

Agreement about some ideas mentioned in the book

1. Consequences of immorality: One could agree with the novel's depiction of the consequences of immoral behavior. Throughout the story, Dorian Gray indulges in a life of hedonism and moral decay, which ultimately leads to his downfall. This can be seen as a cautionary tale about the destructive effects of living without ethical principles, as Dorian's actions result in guilt, shame, and ultimately, his own demise.
2. Importance of morality: Agreeing with the novel's exploration of morality underscores the belief in the importance of ethical conduct. It acknowledges the idea that our actions have consequences not only for ourselves but also for those around us, highlighting the need for a moral compass to guide our decisions and behavior.

Disagreement about some ideas mentioned in the book

1. Fixed moral code: One potential point of disagreement with the novel's portrayal of morality is the idea of a fixed moral code. Some may argue against the notion that a universal set of moral standards applies to all situations and contexts. Instead, they might believe in a more relativistic approach to morality, where ethical judgments are subjective and dependent on individual perspectives and cultural norms.
2. Individual freedom: Another point of contention could be the tension between morality and individual freedom. While the novel presents a cautionary tale about the dangers of immoral behavior, some may argue that strict adherence to moral codes can constrain individual freedom and autonomy. They might advocate for a more flexible approach to morality that allows for personal choice and independence in decision-making.

In the response part of the essay, I would like to analyze the following quotation by Oscar Wilde as it has a close relationship with the core idea of the novel. It is as follows:

“Basil Hallward is what I think I am; Lord Henry what the world thinks of me; Dorian is what I would like to be—in other ages, perhaps”.

This quote was the famous quote uttered by Oscar Wilde regarding the publication of his novel “The Picture of Dorian Gray”. The three main characters in this classic novel – Henry Wotton, Basil Hallward, and Dorian Gray – all display certain qualities of the author. Each quality is unique from one another, but all equally pressing qualities are shielded away from the general public. In this philosophical novel, Wilde has embedded three distinct qualities from his own life experiences – appearances, kindness, and sinfulness – to weave within the three dynamic personalities. He compares himself to the three main characters of the narrative.

3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, “The Picture of Dorian Gray” is a scary and thought-provoking book about beauty, morality and what it means to be a human. Wilde’s work is both poetic and funny, and his characters have many different sides. Even now the book is still widely read and studied by a lot of people. The story of the book suggests that immortalized beauty becomes monstrous in reality, emphasizing the destructive nature of eternal youth. As Dorian’s soul deteriorates, his once-beloved beauty becomes a loathsome reminder of his lost innocence. In this novel, Wilde provides readers with key points of the 19th-century aesthetic movement, his views on beauty, and the roles of artists and critics. He claims that artists or writers should create art not for their own fame but simply to display the beauty in the world. Critics, on the other hand, should experience the beauty of the work without seeking to interpret or analyze it. Critics who attempt to go beneath the surface or to read the symbol of artwork, do so at their peril because, in doing so, they may attribute meanings to the work that were not intended by the artist.

Central to our analysis has been the character of Dorian Gray himself, whose descent into moral degradation serves as both a cautionary tale and a psychological study. As Dorian's outward appearance remains frozen in youth and beauty, his portrait serves as a chilling reflection of his inner corruption, challenging the very essence of his soul.

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