

Gothic Self-Alienation and Psychological Collapse in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

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Abstract

The Victorian era, a period when human life changed and transformed, opened the door to a new world for humanity. As life changed with industrialization, people also transformed some of their ideas along with the changes in their mindset. Lifestyles, morals, ideas, and values were affected and transformed in many segments of society by these changes and transformations. Disproportionate shifts in social structure have caused the rich to become richer while the lower classes become poorer. All of this has led to hypocrisy, immorality, and many other negative transformations in society. Developments in morally degenerate societies have had profound repercussions on human life. Oscar Wilde, one of the most important writers of this period, demonstrated the degeneration of humanity and how it can become monstrous in a changing world in his intriguing work, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Therefore, this study will explain how this work, considered gothic, addressed human life and how the deterioration of social structures in a changing and transforming world affected people's search for meaning and their mindset. It should be noted that the work argues that Dorian's transformation into a monstrous figure stems from the tension between aesthetic surface and moral interiority, generating a form of horror rooted in psychological and ethical decay. At the heart of the book is the portrait, which functions as a site of externalized abjection: a Gothic mirror that absorbs the consequences of Dorian's actions, revealing his hidden self as he becomes increasingly grotesque. Starting from this point, the fact that man becomes a monster by succumbing to his inner ambition, endless desire to live and emotions will be discussed and from this point on, the ways in which man has alienated himself, broken away from society and become a monster in today's world will be revealed. Through the examination of Dorian's portrait, a mechanism emerges that reveals moral collapse and psychological degeneration; this is Dorian's loss of humanity, even of himself, by revealing the dark side inherent in every human being.

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Introduction

Oscar Wilde's work, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, holds a crucial place in late 19th-century English literature in terms of moral aesthetics. The relationship between art, beauty, and morality was a prevalent topic of discussion during this period. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a decadent novel that tells the story of a young man who sells his self and soul to the devil for eternal youth and beauty. And also, it is accepted as a Gothic fiction. Gothic is considered to be a genre or mode of literature that combines fiction, horror and romanticism. From another point of view, Douglas H. Thompson says that "the Gothic, with its gallery of dissipated aristocrats, expresses middle-class rage against unchecked aristocratic power" (Thompson, 2002, p. 406). Wilde, in writing, challenged social expectations. While Dorian is initially presented as a beautiful and captivating person, his transformation into a monster gradually unfolds. He describes how his transformation into a monster leads to a moral collapse and alienation from himself. This depresses Dorian, and his inner self decays.

Dorian Gray's portrait not only depicts his frightening transformations but also his decline and loss of humanity. This portrait reveals Dorian's detachment from the world, from his gradual descent into ecstasy to his moral decline. Every time Dorian looks at the portrait, all he sees is his own ugliness, and as a result, his humanity is dragged into darkness. The book depicts the striking struggle between society's perception of ideal beauty and Dorian's monstrosity. Thus, Wilde's transformation of the concept of horror through the character of Dorian Gray reveals how modern man conceals his inner conflicts, self-alienation, and moral decline under the guise of beauty. This, in turn, reveals problems not only for Dorian but also for society as a whole, from multiple perspectives.

The Novel's Central Internal Tension: Pleasure, Spiritual Progress, and Psychological Darkness

Wilde explores the loss of self-caused by the pursuit of pleasure. Dorian's changes in behavior reflect both psychological collapse and the collapse of the self. This section will examine how Dorian loses his humanity in his pursuit of pleasure. Dorian is very young, beautiful, and inexperienced. He is someone who does not know himself and has not discovered his inner self. Consequently, he is vulnerable to emotional influences. His emotional state is susceptible to influence and manipulation by anyone. He accepts his beauty as a natural state, believing it to be a necessary moral value. This, in turn, paves the way for his psychological downfall. Even today, people experience

downfalls because they fail to achieve this kind of self-awareness. For Wilde, achieving personal pleasure is achieved by abandoning moral values, and these values are reflected in Lord Henry's thinking throughout the story. After meeting Lord Henry, Dorian descends into an even more rapid moral decline. Lord Henry convinces Dorian that pleasure is the sole purpose. He believes one must live life to the fullest. In other words, hedonistic thinking, the idea that one should live for pleasure and that pleasure should form the foundation of one's life, is so effective at manipulating Dorian that his psychological voids are easily influenced by these ideas. It is clear when Lord Henry starts seducing Dorian as he (Henry) says:

"I believe that if one man were to live out his life fully and completely, were to give form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream - I believe that the world would gain such a fresh impulse of joy that we would forget all the maladies of medievalism, and return to the Hellenic ideal - to something finer, richer, than the Hellenic ideal, it may be. But the bravest man amongst us is afraid of himself. The mutilation of the savage has its tragic survival in the self-denial that mars our lives. We are punished for our refusals. Every impulse that we strive to strangle broods in the mind and poisons us. The body sins once, and has done with its sin, for action is a mode of purification. Nothing remains then but the recollection of a pleasure, or the luxury of a regret. 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. It has been said that the great events of the world take place in the brain. It is in the brain, and the brain only, that the great sins of the world take place also" (Wilde, 2013, pp. 30–31).

As a young man, unable to establish his own values, he suddenly finds a gateway to his purpose in life, and this gateway proves alluring. For Henry, even if his youth and beauty fade one day, only pleasure will remain. Dorian embraces this idea so deeply that he believes he will live happily if he lives a life focused on pleasure, while at the same time, the transience of his beauty and youth fills him with profound fear. Psychological conflicts continue to escalate throughout the book. Dorian, who does not want to lose his beauty in his pursuit of pleasure, sees beauty as a moral immunity from that moment on. He idealizes himself so intensely that he begins to see any means necessary to preserve this ideal. Consequently, his psychological collapse gradually paves the way for his downfall.

Pleasure is a very attractive principle, but it is fleeting. When it fades,

when the truth emerges, it is impossible for a person to accept it. A person who cannot accept it falls into psychological depression. Modern humans are also lost in their pursuit of pleasure. Wilde, centuries ago, brilliantly laid out the foundation of human psychological and moral decline with philosophy. Lord Henry describes pleasure to Dorian, but he doesn't specify what the consequences will be. By the time Dorian realizes the consequences, it will be too late for him. This decline has become difficult to reverse and has given rise to profound pathological problems. No matter how beautiful, attractive, or aesthetically pleasing a person, if their inner self is engulfed in darkness, that darkness will not change. Consequently, a person's inner darkness breeds shame. As Allan Baker says:

“It is important to realize that Dorian is first of all an artistic ideal, and the corruption that he undergoes in his hedonistic pursuit of pleasure is the corruption of an artistic ideal. The fact that Dorian's corruption shows only on Hallward's canvas. Hallward's initial self consciousness and mishandling of the ideal have doleful consequences, and it is significant that the artist himself introduces Dorian to Lord Henry's capture (Baker, 1969, p. 355).”

Dorian is horrified after hearing from Henry that his beauty will one day fade. This marks a psychological turning point for him. Beauty is his most important existential value, and facing the reality of losing it brings out the monstrous and terrifying side within him. His fears drive his thoughts, and the decisions he makes are never right. To protect himself, he makes the wrong decisions. He looks at the portrait painted by Basil Hallward and wishes that this portrait would age, not him. While this desire is impossible in the real world, it materializes as a psychological metaphor in the novel. The portrait becomes the carrier of Dorian's spiritual life. As Dorian descends into darkness, depravity, and decadence, the portrait takes on an ugly and aged appearance, while Dorian remains the same no matter how much time passes. Thus, Dorian's soul is split into two distinct objects. This is contrary to human nature. As a person is split into two halves, they continue to drift towards the dark side.

The psychological and spiritual transformation Dorian undergoes begins to leave ugly marks on his portrait. Wilde touches upon the psychological point at which a person can sacrifice all their inner beauty for beauty. Pleasure may temporarily bring Dorian pleasant feelings that bring him happiness, but over time, he becomes so insensitive and unfeeling that his psychological collapse transforms him into an insensitive monster. As he becomes more insensitive, Dorian becomes irrational and lacks the capacity for empathy.

It could be argued that his alienation from his true self and his moral and psychological collapse are a consequence of this insensitivity. As Dorian's psychological makeup evolves towards darkness and monstrosity, he takes on a personality impervious to the feelings and experiences of others. This isolation creates a complete egocentrism. A person who sees himself as the center of the world fails to understand the suffering of others, fails to hear their desires, and fails to acknowledge their existence. Just as pleasure isolates a person from others, so too does he become alienated from his own self—in other words, he becomes alienated from himself. A person alienated from himself cannot be expected to live a morally and psychologically correct life. The more painful his portrait becomes, the more insensitive he becomes in an attempt to escape his own suffering. Because deep down, he knows that the portrait has become this way as a result of his evil actions. Humanity is terrified of facing its own truth. These truths are a tool for him to find his true self. But using these tools requires responsibility. And a person who is not strong enough avoids responsibility, just like Dorian.

Dorian's transformation into a monster doesn't happen overnight; he gradually slides from the allure of pleasure to spiritual degradation, and each stage of this slide is psychologically based. The most dangerous aspect of pleasure is that it makes one feel good but doesn't make one better. A person who fails to see the difference between these two points gradually becomes alienated from themselves. This is Dorian's situation. He feeds himself on pleasure, but becomes empty inside. For someone addicted to pleasure, there are no limits; they only want more. Dorian, too, lives with the desire to "feel more," but every feeling brings a new collapse. Here, Wilde demonstrates that pleasure does not sustain one; it only deepens the emptiness within. The story of Dorian Gray is not an aesthetic-social event; it is the story of the growing power of the psychological monster a person creates within themselves.

Dorian's Psychological Disintegration: Shame, Fear, and Alienation

Dorian Gray's collapse, which unfolds as he distances himself from his true self, is the most striking aspect of the novel. As Dorian becomes increasingly alienated from himself, his actions begin to change. Fear, shame, and self-alienation are central to the process of change and transformation. All these elements of change carry profound implications for how Dorian's psychological collapse occurs. When a person avoids confronting their own self, what emerges is actually fear. For Dorian, the source of this fear is the terrifying changes he sees in his self-portrait. As the portrait changes,

Dorian's fear intensifies. The painful emotions he feels when he looks at his portrait are the root cause of the growing darkness within him. As this darkness grows, Dorian transforms into a monster and loses his humanity. Although *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is considered a Gothic and philosophical novel, it can also be classified as a horror novel. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was quite remarkable at the time of its publication because it disregards Victorian morality.

When the portrait reveals Dorian's unacceptable inner darkness, he becomes simultaneously frightened and ashamed of himself. Fear of the monster within, of his own reality, is also known in psychology as "the fear of self-awareness." In other words, this fear is a way for a person to escape their dark side. As Dorian flees this fear, he distances himself further and further from himself, and this increasing distance eventually begins to uglify the portrait. Ultimately, all these feelings lead to his alienation from himself. Self-alienation is the loss of one's own self and the inability to recognize oneself. When Dorian notices the horrific transformation in the portrait, he avoids looking at it, thus escaping both himself and his true self. Over time, his feelings dull, and all emotional connections are severed. Emotions are the most fundamental bonds a person forms with themselves. Losing them makes it difficult for a person to find themselves.

Self-alienation is a psychological state in which a person loses touch with their own identity, loses self-recognition, and becomes a character alienated from their own existence. Dorian's avoidance of looking at the portrait also means avoiding self-awareness. Each time this avoidance repeats, Dorian distances himself further from his true self and begins to perceive himself as an externally created image, such as an 'external image,' a 'role,' or a 'performance.' As he distances himself from himself, a feeling less being emerges, a monstrous being, just like Dorian. In today's world, people have become so disconnected from their inner worlds by the influence of the outside world that self-alienation is inevitable. In light of all this, moral alienation also begins in people. Because a person who fails to consider the consequences of their actions deteriorates their morality, and every time Dorian commits an act—a horrific act—he blames the portrait for it, increasing his immorality. It becomes increasingly difficult for him to truly recognize himself. Over time, Dorian loses his ability to recognize himself, but at the same time, he sees himself as beautiful and good, and the portrait continues to become uglier, leading to self-doubt. As he sees himself as both good and beautiful and ugly in the portrait, he experiences identity confusion and becomes alienated from his own identity.

The Portrait's Monstrous Metaphor: The Development of Monstrosity and the Hidden Self

The decadent style centers around themes such as cultural disintegration and identity confusion. In this context, Slusser evaluates the work's position within decadent horror literature as follows:

“An important prototype of the decadent horror story, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* treats thematically a number of ideas that influenced the stylistic and aesthetic choices made in later, and more sophisticated, works of decadent horror literature. In spite of the fact that it was one of the first stories to broach the subject of cultural decadence and its attendant stylistic analogue, however, Wilde's portrait is not the quintessential decadent horror story that critics have generally taken it to be. It does, of course, possess many of the earmarks of the genre. It gives a decadent treatment to a traditional supernatural theme or motifs—in this case, the motif of doppelgänger that arises as the spectral, subconscious other in such early supernatural fiction”. (Slusser, 1992, p.96).

In the novel, portrait makes invisible emotions visible. Dorian Gray becomes a typical example of monstrosity since he violates the moral principles of Victorian society. As Christine Fergusson says:

“In the scandalous *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), the young protagonist is freed from social and moral accountability through his representation in Basil Hallward's painting. No longer forced to bear the physical markings of his own compromised soul, Gray indulges in a series of increasingly vile acts that culminate in murder and suicide. (Fergusson, 2002, p. 471)”.

A person's psychological well-being, fear, shame, and negative thoughts, are internal experiences. These are not visible in the social sphere. Wilde aims to reveal hidden emotions through portrait. In this way, he reveals and embodies the darkness hidden within a person. Dorian's inner darkness and moral collapse are also revealed through the portrait. Without the portrait, it would have emerged in a different form. This phenomenon is called “concretization of projection” in psychology. In other words, it is the perception of behavioral patterns or thoughts that one does not want to see in oneself, through an object.

Dorian Gray's behavior gradually leads to a loss of emotion and a tendency toward violence. After fear and shame, the worst thing a human can experience is becoming a monster and losing their emotions. For someone

without emotions, a tendency toward violence is inevitable. Even today, it's clear that those who have lost themselves and cannot reveal their humanity turn to violence and evil. Dorian, too, is losing his emotions day by day. In the story, we see this loss in various forms, including violence, suicide, murder, and death. Oscar Wilde portrays a crucial situation in the story after Sybil Vane commits suicide after Dorian betrays her and leaves her alone. When Sybil becomes Dorian's girlfriend, Dorian is captivated by her beauty as well as her theatrical talent. However, when Sybil, influenced by true love, performs poorly in the theater, Dorian becomes estranged from Sybil and breaks up with her, driven by the monstrous part of himself. Sybil commits suicide after learning that Dorian no longer loves her. Dorian, who felt horror when he first learned it, thought;

"So I have murdered Sibyl Vane," said Dorian Gray, half to himself, "murdered her as surely as if I had cut her little throat with a knife. Yet The roses are not less lovely for all that. The birds sing just as happily in my garden And to-night I am to dine with you, and then go on to The opera, and sup somewhere, I suppose, afterwards. How extraordinarily dramatic life is! If I had read all this in a book, Harry, I think I would have wept over it. Somehow, now that it has happened. Actually, and to me, it seems far too wonderful for tears. Here is the first passionate love-letter I have ever written in my life. Strange, that my first passionate love-letter should have been addressed to a dead girl" (Wilde, 2013, p. 121).

This situation is considered one of the first steps that affect her becoming a monster. Sibyl's death becomes a tool to open the doors to the deep emptiness within him. From that day on, Dorian takes on a completely different personality, detaching himself from his true self and disappearing. Dorian then murders Basil Hallward, the artist who painted his portrait and his close friend. Dorian professionally covers up this crime, showing no remorse. This could be considered his second, frightening side. In fact, once a person surrenders to darkness, they become alienated from themselves, unable to escape it.

Analysis

Modern Man and Hedonistic Culture: The Psychological Pressure of Pleasure

Today, the modern world touches people's most sensitive points, affecting them psychologically. According to the modern world, pleasure should always be a constant in a person's life. In this pleasure-focused world,

people shape themselves, their thoughts, and their values accordingly. People resort to any means necessary to achieve their desires and pleasures. As labeled after Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, Freud never focused on the term “desire” as a separate manifesto; in fact, he related the term to the unconscious, where he saw it as an original storehouse of instinctual pleasure for the unconscious (Thurschwell, 2009, p. 4). In fact, if we look at Freud, unlike other scholars, Freud clearly stated that human interest stems from their needs. It is inevitable for a person who seeks to achieve these needs to experience pleasure at its highest. You cannot reach yourself without pleasure, and with pleasure, you begin your journey to yourself. Which takes it back to Freud’s words that “the pleasure principle is proper to a primary method of working on the part of the mental apparatus[...] under the influence of the ego’s instincts... the pleasure principle is replaced by the reality principle” (Freud, 1961 p. 4), and in accordance with Freud and both drives it is clearly deduced that without unpleasure, it is impossible to reach the pleasure itself, “the feeling of pleasure and unpleasure into relation” (Freud, 1961, p. 3).

These thoughts he developed about the human mind demonstrate that Freud viewed the concepts of pleasure and desire as components of the human mind. When Dorian, under the influence of Lord Henry, made pleasure the fundamental basis of his life, he actually opened the door to a human condition. However, like the person who experiences pleasure in the wrong way and cannot close himself off from its dark influence, Dorian found himself a monster in the darkness. In this context, Dorian Gray can be considered a prototype of a line of psychological reading that stretches from the 19th century to the 21st century. Modern humans, like Dorian, are psychologically driven to seek “maximum pleasure” from their lives. This is because the human brain is convinced that pleasure will lead to happiness. While pleasure is always expected to bring goodness and happiness, emotions inherent in life, such as sadness, anxiety, and fatigue, disrupt a person’s psychological balance. A person whose balance is disrupted makes poor choices in their pursuit of self-discovery and meaning.

Aristotle, one of the most important philosophers of antiquity, considered pleasure as the completed result of every action while simultaneously considering it as happiness. In fact, for him, pleasure is not a becoming, not an action, but a goal. Plato, on the other hand, placed pleasure within the realm of what happens, within the realm of non-conceptual existence. He believed that happiness, too, depends on the spiritual and ethical state of man (Akarsu, 1998, p. 129). In hedonism, pleasure was a way of life. The basis of the understanding adopted by the doctrine of pleasure is as follows:

“We tend towards pleasure from childhood. We avoid pain” (Akarsu, 1998, p. 60). While pleasure was once thought of as simple relaxation, today it is misperceived as a means of self-affirmation. Like Dorian, those who misunderstand the nature of pleasure become attached to the external rather than the internal. The fundamental pillars of identity are moral consideration, self-honesty, responsibility, and inner peace. Constantly prioritizing pleasure weakens these pillars. Aesthetic pleasures sometimes provide such intense pleasure and happiness that they can even lead to a higher level of thought, that is, metaphysics (Hutter Throsby, 2013, p. 58). As Dorian’s inner peace fades, his morality erodes, and ultimately, a monstrous identity emerges. To avoid recognizing his inner emptiness, Dorian turns to various pleasures, a form of escape. Hedonistic culture not only legitimizes this escape, but also encourages it. “Enjoy yourself until you feel good,” he says. Wilde, on the other hand, has shown in *Dorian Gray* that there is a huge gap between feeling good through pleasure and being good.

Modern Identity Collapse, Uncanny, and a Form of Self-Alienation

Today, the foundation of human identity lies in making oneself more human. However, when the fatigue, stress, and weaknesses inherent in life interfere with this, people feel incomplete, distance themselves from their true self, and become alienated from themselves. Just as Dorian Gray avoids looking at his portrait, people avoid confronting their true self. Chaudhary and Reddy (2025) define self-alienation among high perfectionists as “not immediately observable...” (p. 246). Instead, it manifests in more subtle existential domains: a chronic sense of being “out of sync” with one’s inner experience, dissonance between values and actions, and a mechanized approach to life that prioritizes image over authenticity (Khossousi, 2024, Nam & Lee, 2020).

Narcissism is often at the core of self-alienation. In the modern world, when people focus on the external rather than the internal, they believe their own value comes only from the external. Thus, the ideal self becomes a necessity in life. It is explained as follows, “It is argued that every grandiose narcissistic individual has a shy and vulnerable side, and every fragile and self-critical narcissistic individual has feelings of entitlement and grandiosity” (McWilliams, 2013, cited in: Akça, 2017, p. 12). As people act to prove and show themselves to others, their inner identity disintegrates. In their daily pursuit of self-promotion through virtues like beauty, goodness, and success, they ignore their inner anxieties, fears, shames, and weaknesses. And as they avoid their inner selves, they lose themselves through buried feelings.

Dorian, captivated by his unchanging external beauty, failed to see the portrait's increasingly ugly face as he lived, fueling the darkness within him.

As Dorian's portrait continued to grow uglier, he unwilling to see it, had it removed to a dark room in the attic. There, he revealed his repressed inner self, the monster within. He was so afraid of it that he hid it to prevent this fear from destroying him, just as he had hidden his own inner self. But the portrait was there, and its existence was undeniable. As long as it remained there, every evil act Dorian committed only further uglified it. The story of Dorian Gray is not merely a reflection of youth and depravity in the 19th century Victorian era. It is a depiction of the internally fragmented and self-alienated human condition still experienced today.

Spiritual Emptiness and the Return of the “Monster Within”

The final chapters of Dorian Gray reveal that Dorian's behavior has, in fact, shifted from finding goodness and happiness through pleasure to a spiritual collapse. Initially, as he engages in petty pursuits for his own pleasure, his increasingly monstrous side leads to a disconnection from his inner values. Because *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is considered a Gothic novel by its central theme and use of setting, the monsters do not reside in castles or cemeteries, as in Gothic literature, because monstrosity is a Gothic perspective that inhabits the inner world of the modern individual. Dorian continues to be recklessly lost in evil, unquestioning why he does what he does. Other people's pain, love, emotions, and lives are tensions that do not concern him. As his portrait becomes uglier, the void of meaning within him grows, and his drift continues. Basil, seeing the scarred portrait, reminds Dorian of his monstrosity, while simultaneously asserting that he can change and still turn to good; Basil wants to see Dorian's soul, but he says, “Only God can do that” (Wilde, 2013, p. 181). He is so enraged at Basil that when Dorian kills Basil without a blink, he actually kills any possibility of change within him. From this perspective, killing means Dorian letting go of his last remaining human conscience. Dorian Gray glanced at the picture, and suddenly an uncontrollable feeling of hatred for Basil Hallward came over him, as though it had been suggested to him by the image on the canvas, whispered into his ear by those grinning lips. The mad passions of a hunted animal stirred within him, and he loathed the man who was seated at the table, more than in his whole life he had ever loathed anything. He glanced wildly around. Something glimmered on the top of the painted chest that faced him. His eye fell on it. He knew what it was. It was a knife that he had brought up, some days before, to cut a piece of cord, and had forgotten to take away with him. He moved slowly towards it, passing Hallward as

he did so. As soon as he got behind him, he seized it and turned round. Hallward stirred in his chair as if he was going to rise. 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, 2013, p.187).

With Basil's murder, the reader witnesses the truth a person hides within, the destruction of their identity. The portrait, disfigured by years of misdeeds, and the evils it accumulates, comes back to Dorian. He allows the monster within him to completely consume him, completely destroying his own self. Basil was the last vestige of Dorian's humanity, a conscience. And with his murder, the monster within him spiraled out of control. During and after the murder, Dorian believed he had temporarily silenced his fear and shame. However, the darkness within him deepened. With each day his portrait changed, he avoided responsibility for his actions, but after killing Basil, he reached the pinnacle of monstrosity. At the height of his monstrosity, he destroyed his narcissistic self, built on pleasure, and became even more fearful. Dorian believed that by killing Basil, he had forever rejected the moral responsibility that both he and the portrait bore. In light of this, he fell silent, but the unquenchable fear and shame within him drove him to his own death.

Dorian's stabbing death, unable to bear the darkness within his inner self, can be considered the culmination of the novel's Gothic atmosphere. From this perspective, Dorian succumbs to the monster within. The terrifying sensations he experiences when looking at his portrait lead him to suspect that the truth will eventually be revealed. Unable to accept the destruction of his beauty and the narcissistic identity he built upon pleasure, Dorian destroys reality once and for all. This is the final stage of narcissism: the individual is ready to destroy his true self to preserve his idealized image. After death, Dorian's body becomes ugly and aged, and in place of his disfigured body, the portrait returns to its original beauty. Dorian Gray's suicide is not only a tragedy of Victorian youth but also a significant preview of modern man's psychological decline. Like Dorian, modern man avoids confronting the truth hidden behind external beauty. In a modern pleasure-oriented culture, shame and self-reflection are buried deeper, and as a result, the individual must constantly create new stimuli to avoid seeing his self-portrait—his true self. But this buried "hidden self," like the decaying portrait Dorian keeps in the attic, sooner or later returns as behavior, emotional exhaustion, and moral conflict.

Conclusion

The Picture of Dorian Gray is a philosophical and psychological novel set in a Victorian Gothic atmosphere, depicting the monster a person can become when they run away from themselves. It depicts a person's alienation from their inner world and the consequences of this alienation. Dorian's pursuit of pleasure, followed by his narcissistic admiration for his own beauty, marks the beginning of his moral decline. The monstrous identity hidden behind their beauty symbolizes how terrifying a person can become as they distance themselves from their inner world. The danger Dorian faces grows as he distances himself from his true self. As the distance in his search for meaning deepens, he is driven to acts of self-destruction. Wilde thus demonstrates that ethical collapse and the fragmentation of identity do not stem from major, sudden moments of darkness, but rather from an inner decay accumulated by the lies of the lesser self. In the novel, the murder of Basil and the attempted destruction of the portrait demonstrate that the more a person attempts to silence their conscience and truth, the more destructive they become. Therefore, Dorian's death represents the psychological collapse of a person who has lost their own self.

This situation also applies to people in the modern world. Human beings suppress their true self for the sake of their external image and pleasure. The modern individual operates through the mechanism of external self-presentation. In every realm where shame is suppressed and pleasure becomes the norm, the individual distances himself from himself, and the darker aspects within him grow uncontrollably. Wilde's work thus reveals not only the moral panic of the Victorian era but also the crisis of the modern subject, characterized by persistent alienation and lack of identity. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* warns us that truth does not disappear when it is concealed; a person can only become whole when he honestly confronts the monster, he has created within himself.

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