

**People's Democratic Republic of Algeria
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
University of Tlemcen**



**Faculty of Letters and Languages
Department of English**

**The Theme of Superficiality in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture
of Dorian Gray***

Dissertation submitted to the department of English as a partial fulfilment of
the requirements for Master's degree in Literature and Civilisation

Presented by

Bouchra OUADAH

Supervised by

Prof. Ilhem SERIR

Board of Examiners

Dr. Souad BERBAR

MCB

Chair

Prof. Ilhem SERIR

Professor

Supervisor

Dr. Amel RAHMOUNI

MCB

Examiner

2022 – 2023

DEDICATION

To my loved ones

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to convey my heartfelt thanks to my supervisor, Prof Ilhem SERIR, for her encouragement constructive feedback, and the time she spent in guiding me throughout completion of my dissertation

I would also like to thank the examiners, Dr Souad BERBAR, and Dr Amel RAHMOUNI, for their willingness to review our work

Special appreciation to all our teachers for their efforts in passing on their expertise. Their efforts are not in vain

ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the theme of superficiality, its implications, and its underlying critique of Victorian societal norms. To explain this, we focused on Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and the interactions between the characters to expose the consequences of superficial living. To approach the aim of this work, the researcher employed an analytical method to depict Oscar Wilde's portrayal of superficiality and how it affected the Victorian society. Thus, the findings of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of Wilde's critique of shallow values and the societal repercussions of prioritizing appearances. The research will begin with an overview about Oscar Wilde's life and his novel as well as the relevant theories related to the theme of superficiality in literature. Then, it will provide a close reading of the novel shedding light on the portrayal of Dorian Gray and the impact of influence on him. Therefore, this research highlights the enduring relevance of Wilde's work and invites a critical reflection on the impact of superficiality.

Keywords: Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, superficiality, aestheticism, Victorian society, moral decay.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication.....	I
Acknowledgement.....	II
Abstract.....	III
Table of contents.....	IV
General Introduction:.....	VI

CHAPTER ONE: A Literature Review on "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*" and Oscar

Wilde's Theory of New Hedonism and Aestheticism

1.1: Introduction.....	11
1.2: Oscar Wilde's <i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i>	12
1.2.1: Wilde's Biography.....	12
1.2.2: 2 Oscar Wilde's <i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i>	17
1.3: The Theory of New Hedonism.....	19
1.3.1: The Role of Pleasure.....	20
1.3.2: Criticism of Traditional Morality.....	21
1.3.3: Individualism and Freedom.....	22
1.3.4: The Role of Aesthetics.....	24
1.4: Aestheticism and Its Correlation with Superficiality	25
1.4.1: The Aesthetic Movement (1860 – 1900).....	25
1.4.2: Critics Reviews on Aestheticism.....	32
1.5: Conclusion.....	36

Chapter Two: Literary Analysis of the Superficial Nature in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

2.1: Introduction.....	40
2.2: Dorian Gray vs His character.....	41
2.2.1: Physical Appearance vs. Inner Character.....	41
2.2.2: The Role of Influence and The Nature of Beauty.....	42
2.2.3: Dorian's True Character and The Impact of The Portrait on Him.....	44
2.3: The Issue of Physical Appearance and The Deterioration of Society's Values in The Novel.....	45
2.3.1: The Obsession with Physical Beauty.....	46
2.3.2: The Decay of Society's Values and The Corruption of Youth.....	49
2.4: Aestheticism vs Morality.....	50
2.4.1: The Conflict Between Aestheticism and Morality.....	51
2.4.2: The Role of Art and The Dangers of Excess.....	52
2.5 The Pursuit of Pleasure and The Death of Dorian Gray.....	54
2.5.1: The Dangers of Hedonism and The Consequences of Vanity.....	54
2.5.2: The Corruption of Innocence.....	56
2.5: Conclusion	59
General Conclusion.....	63
Works Cited.....	65

General Introduction

General Introduction:

Appearances can be deceiving. Just like the outer beauty of an apple can hide the decay inside. Similarly, the allure of superficiality can conceal the darkest depths of the human soul. Superficiality is an intriguing theme in literature that often serves as a mirror reflecting the complexities of human nature and society. In Oscar Wilde's renowned novel, "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*," the theme of superficiality takes center stage, revealing the lure and dangers hidden beneath its dazzling facade. This dissertation delves deep into the exploration and analysis of superficiality in "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*," shedding light on its multifaceted manifestations and the profound implications it holds for individuals and society.

Throughout history, literature has acted as a medium to critique, challenge, and unravel societal norms and values. Superficiality, in its various forms, has been a recurring subject of examination, as it embodies the pursuit of external appearances, materialistic desires, and temporary pleasures. Wilde's novel, published in 1890, confronts these issues head-on, presenting a haunting tale of a man who gives in to the seductive power of eternal youth, wealth, and physical beauty. The enchanting portrait of Dorian Gray becomes the embodiment of his hidden sins and moral decay, while he himself remains unblemished, eternally youthful and seemingly untainted.

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the theme of superficiality in "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*" through a comprehensive examination of the novel's characters, plot, and symbolism. By analyzing the complex interactions between appearance and reality, superficiality and morality, and beauty and corruption, this study aims to address the following research questions:

1. How does Oscar Wilde portray superficiality in "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*" through the characters and their interactions?
2. What role does aestheticism play in the cultivation and perpetuation of superficiality in the novel?
3. How does the influence of societal norms and expectations contribute to the theme of superficiality in "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*"?
4. In what ways does the pursuit of beauty and physical appearance lead to the characters' moral degradation and corruption?
5. How does the use of symbolism, particularly the portrait of Dorian Gray, highlight the destructive nature of superficiality?

To achieve this objective, this dissertation is divided into two chapters. Chapter one serves as a literature review, delving into existing critical interpretations, scholarly works, and relevant theories related to the theme of superficiality in literature. This chapter lays the groundwork for the subsequent analysis and helps identify the gaps within the context of "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*."

Chapter two, the analysis chapter, delves into a close reading of the novel itself. Through an examination of key characters, such as Dorian Gray, Lord Henry Wotton, and Basil Hallward, it will uncover the complex layers of superficiality and its profound impact on their lives. Moreover, there will be an analysis of Wilde's masterful use of literary techniques, such as symbolism to create a narrative that confronts societal obsession with appearances and explores the moral consequences of indulging in superficial desires.

By exploring the theme of superficiality in "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*," this dissertation aims to contribute to the understanding of human nature, societal values, and the potential

dangers of living a life consumed by external appearances. It will reveal the complexities that lie beneath the surface through a careful examination of Wilde's work.

**Chapter One: A Literature
Review on "*The Picture of
Dorian Gray*" and Oscar
Wilde's Theory of New
Hedonism and Aestheticism**

Chapter One: A Literature Review on "The Picture of Dorian Gray" and Oscar Wilde's Theory of New Hedonism and Aestheticism

Chapter One: A Literature Review on "The Picture of Dorian Gray" and Oscar Wilde's Theory of New Hedonism and Aestheticism

1.1 Introduction

Literature is a work of art it expresses the author's deepest thoughts and exposes his surroundings. The purpose of this literature review is to provide a comprehensive overview of the research related to the topic of superficiality in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

In the first part of this chapter, the focus is put on Oscar Wilde, an Irish playwright, novelist, and poet who lived a controversial life in the late 19th century due to his unconventional beliefs and behaviour that challenged Victorian society's norms and values. The chapter will begin by providing the author's biography and his major life events, it will then explore his only novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* a novel that has captured the attention of readers and scholars alike with its themes of art, beauty, morality, and corruption.

In the second part the focus shifts to the theory of new hedonism as well as the correlation of aestheticism with superficiality. First, the research work will tackle the origins of the theory of new hedonism and its key principles, then it will discuss the aesthetic movement and provide an analysis of the critics' reviews concerning aestheticism.

The aim of this study is to provide a comprehensive understanding of Oscar Wilde's life and the philosophical and artistic movements that he helped shape. By analysing the existing data, this research's target is to contribute to a more nuanced and informed understanding of the cultural and intellectual landscape of Wilde's time.

Chapter One: A Literature Review on "The Picture of Dorian Gray" and Oscar Wilde's Theory of New Hedonism and Aestheticism

1.2 Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Oscar Wilde is a prominent writer and leader of the Aesthetic Movement, known for his wit and subversive social commentary. One of his most famous works is the novel "The Picture of Dorian Gray", which tells the story of a young man who becomes increasingly corrupted by his pursuit of pleasure and beauty. Through its exploration of art, morality, and the dangers of aestheticism, the novel has become a classic of both Gothic and Aesthetic literature.

1.2.1 Wilde's Biography

Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde was born in October 16, 1854, Dublin, Ireland to Sir William Wilde a leading ear and eye surgeon, and his wife Lady Jane Francesca Wilde a successful poet and journalist who wrote patriotic Irish verse under the pseudonym "Speranza". Oscar was highly influenced by his mother's literary success.

1.2.1.1 University Education

From 1871 to 1874, Wilde attended Portora Royal School in Enniskillen, Ireland, before studying classics at Trinity College in Dublin. By the age of twenty-three Oscar Wilde entered Oxford where "[he] had dressed in outlandish outfits, courted famous people and built his public image" (Stayley 317). As a result, Wilde earned a reputation of being effeminate, he was fascinated by the arts and decorated his room with all types of what he called "objets d'arts" from peacock feathers to the two vases of blue China which inspired his famous remark "I find it harder and harder every day to live up to my blue China." According to Ellman "It remains one of Wilde's most memorable assertions, and the earliest to gain currency." (115) He adds, "No one else could have said it." (115) This latter quickly became a slogan used by the aesthetes and Wilde became well known in Oxford.

Chapter One: A Literature Review on "The Picture of Dorian Gray" and Oscar Wilde's Theory of New Hedonism and Aestheticism

Before influencing the aesthetes and becoming the father of the aesthetic movement Wilde himself was influenced, he was fascinated by John Ruskin and Walter Pater for according to Ellman they were the inevitable poles of attraction for an undergraduate with artistic tastes. (119) "He was their child but also eventually not on speaking terms intellectually with his parents". Ruskin's main effect on Wilde, and on the Aesthetic Movement in general, was the significance he placed on beauty, both in art and in life. However, Wilde distanced himself from his early tutor because he eventually held a very different view of the link between art and truth. Pater, on the other hand, believed that art exists solely for the purpose of beauty. He argued in the preface to *The Renaissance* that aesthetic judgement should be adjusted to "seeing one's object as it really is." On which Wilde commented in *De Profundis* saying "that book that has had such a strange influence over my life". The two philosophers shaped Wilde's ideas for he gained a purpose for the arts through the lectures and writings of John Ruskin and Pater's works gave him his sense of devotion to art. Wilde became devoted to the aesthetic movement; he wrote several essays on the subject such as "*The Decay of Lying*" and "*The Critic as Artist*." In "*The Decay of Lying*," he argued that art should not be judged by its moral or social utility, but rather by its ability to create pleasure and beauty. He wrote, "Art is the most intense mode of individualism that the world has known...The aim of life is self-development. To realize one's nature perfectly--that is what each of us is here for" (Wilde 5)

In 1877, Oscar Wilde travelled to Italy and Greece with his former tutor, John Pentland Mahaffy who was a classicist and scholar of ancient Greek literature. This trip had a profound impact on his appreciation of ancient Greek culture and aesthetics, which would later influence his literary work and his ideas about art and beauty. Ellmann notes that these travels were a formative experience for Wilde, who was deeply influenced by the art and culture of these countries. He writes that "Wilde was entranced by Greece, which seemed to him the very

Chapter One: A Literature Review on "The Picture of Dorian Gray" and Oscar Wilde's Theory of New Hedonism and Aestheticism

embodiment of beauty and harmony" (185). Ellmann also notes that Wilde's travels to Italy had a profound impact on his writing, particularly his appreciation for the Renaissance and the art of the period. He writes that "Wilde was struck by the beauty and artistry of the Italian cities, and his travels there helped to shape his aesthetic philosophy" (186). Overall, Ellmann's discussion of Wilde's travels to Greece and Italy highlights the importance of these experiences in shaping Wilde's artistic and cultural sensibilities.

A year later Wilde won the 1878 Newdigate Prize for his poem "Ravenna" which according to Ellmann was written due to Wilde's interest in Dante's poetry and his visit to Ravenna, Italy, where Dante is buried. This latter explores themes of decay and loss in the city's ancient ruins (193-194). The poet graduated the same year from Oxford with a double first in his B.A. of Classical Moderations and Literae Humaniores.

1.2.1.2 His Career as a Poet and an Author

Oscar Wilde returned to Dublin for a short time after graduating from Oxford, then to England, where he set himself up as a bachelor at Tite Street, Chelsea, London, with his inheritance from the sale of his father's houses, and spent the next six years in London, Paris, and the United States, where he delivered lectures. Wilde had also been publishing lyrics and poems in periodicals, particularly Kottabos and the Dublin University Magazine since entering Trinity College.

At the age of 27, he published *Poems*, which collected and corrected all his poems. Although this latter sold out on its first print, it was not deemed very successful and was not well regarded by many critics, the Punch a very known magazine at the time even called his poetry "tame" by saying "The poet is Wilde, but his poetry is tame" and according Ellman "Wilde was accused of the available vices, from plagiarism to insincerity to indecency" (489),

Chapter One: A Literature Review on "The Picture of Dorian Gray" and Oscar Wilde's Theory of New Hedonism and Aestheticism

as a result it was denounced by The Oxford Union for alleged plagiarism in a close vote. However, other reviewers such as Rodd Runnell praised the book's lyrical qualities and Wilde's skill as a poet. Despite the mixed reviews, "*Poems*" did help establish Wilde as a rising star in the literary world. The book was widely read and discussed, and it helped to set the stage for Wilde's later success as a playwright and novelist.

Oscar Wilde visited America in 1882 on a lecture tour that was organised by his literary agent, Richard D'Oyly Carte. Wilde arrived in New York City on January 3, 1882, and was greeted by a crowd of reporters and admirers. He was struck at first by the city's bustling energy, but soon grew frustrated with the lack of sophistication and culture that he found there. Despite his initial misgivings, Wilde's lectures were well received by American audiences. He gave talks on art, literature, and aesthetics, and was celebrated for his wit and charm. However, his lectures were also controversial, as he challenged conventional notions of gender and sexuality, and expressed admiration for the aesthetic qualities of same-sex relationships. Wilde's tour continued through several other cities, including Philadelphia, Boston, and Washington D.C. In each location, he was received with both adoration and criticism, with some critics denouncing him as a dangerous influence on American morals. His American adventure according to Ellmann was one of the high points of his career, not for what he accomplished, but for what he represented" (223).

After his tour ended, Wilde returned to England, where he continued to write and publish works that would mark him as one of the most important writers of his generation. "By the time he was thirty Wilde was already a leading member of the literary world in London"(Ellmann 134), publishing collections of poetry and essays, as well as a series of successful plays that made him famous such as his first play, "*Lady Windermere's Fan*," which was produced in 1892 and was a critical and commercial success. He went on to write several

Chapter One: A Literature Review on "The Picture of Dorian Gray" and Oscar Wilde's Theory of New Hedonism and Aestheticism

more plays, including "*A Woman of No Importance*," "*An Ideal Husband*," and "*The Importance of Being Earnest*". He made a name for himself in society and was known for his flamboyant dress and mannerisms.

1.2.1.3 His Marriage and Affaires

In 1884 Oscar Wilde was married to Constance Lloyd, a wealthy woman from a well-respected family; she and Oscar had known each other since childhood. Constance was a supportive partner to Oscar and was known for her intelligence, beauty, and sense of style. She was also a writer and an artist. The couple had two kids together, Cyril and Vyvyan. However, their marriage was tumultuous according to Ellmann "The circumstances of the marriage were unusual, even though Oscar was not then known as an eccentric" (233). Oscar Wilde had affairs with several men, including Lord Alfred Douglas. Constance was aware of Oscar's affairs but initially tolerated them but when Oscar's relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas became particularly scandalous it drew Wilde away from his wife and children and into a dangerous and self-destructive world (Ellmann 346), which made Constance separate from him and take their children to live in Europe.

Alfred Douglas altered Oscar Wilde's life. The couple had a romantic relationship that lasted several years, starting in the 1890s. Lord Alfred Douglas, also known as "Bosie," was a young, wealthy aristocrat and writer who became infatuated with Wilde. The relationship was passionate but also tumultuous and had a significant impact on Wilde's life and career. Richard Ellmann claims that "Bosie was not merely an attractive young man to whom Wilde was attracted; he was a young man who shared Wilde's poetic and romantic sense of life" (347). Lord Alfred's father, the Marquess of Queensberry, disapproved of his son's relationship with Wilde and publicly accused Wilde of homosexuality, which was then illegal in Britain. This

Chapter One: A Literature Review on "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*" and Oscar Wilde's Theory of New Hedonism and Aestheticism

led to Wilde's suing for libel, but the trial resulted in Wilde's own arrest and conviction for homosexuality. During his time in prison, Wilde wrote a letter to Douglas, which was later published as "*De Profundis*." In the letters, Wilde expressed his love for Douglas but also blamed him for his downfall, stating that Douglas had led him into a life of excess and extravagance. After Wilde's release from prison, the two had a brief reconciliation, but their relationship ultimately ended in a bitter and public feud. Douglas continued to attack Wilde in the press, and Wilde eventually sued him for libel, leading to Douglas's own imprisonment.

In 1897, Oscar Wilde spent the last few years of his life in Paris which was at the time a cultural and artistic hub, and he was drawn to its vibrant and bohemian atmosphere. Wilde lived in several different apartments during his time in Paris, often relying on the financial support of friends and acquaintances. He continued to write during this time, but his health and finances were poor. Wilde's time in Paris was marked by a sense of isolation and sadness. He suffered from poor health and was often in pain. He also struggled to regain his reputation and find success as a writer. Wilde died in Paris on November 30, 1900, at the age of 46. He was buried in the famous Pere Lachaise cemetery.

1.2.2 Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

The Picture of Dorian Gray is a novel written by Oscar Wilde, first published in 1890. The story is about a young man named Dorian Gray, who is extremely handsome and charming, and who becomes obsessed with his own beauty and youth. The novel begins with Dorian Gray sitting for a portrait painted by the talented artist Basil Hallward. While posing for the portrait, Dorian meets Lord Henry Wotton, a cynical and hedonistic aristocrat who introduces Dorian to a life of pleasure and excess. Dorian becomes increasingly narcissistic and selfish, and he wishes that he could stay young and beautiful forever, while the portrait would age

Chapter One: A Literature Review on "The Picture of Dorian Gray" and Oscar Wilde's Theory of New Hedonism and Aestheticism

instead of him. Dorian's wish comes true, and he remains young and beautiful while the portrait ages and reflects his true character. Over time, he becomes increasingly cruel and corrupt, indulging in every vice imaginable, while the portrait shows the physical and moral decay of his soul. As Dorian's actions become more and more depraved, he becomes increasingly paranoid about the portrait and tries to hide it away. Eventually, he can no longer bear the guilt of his actions, and he decides to destroy the portrait, which leads to his own downfall.

The Picture of Dorian Gray was an exceptional philosophical novel although it was unwelcomed by many critics for it was written in England during the Victorian era; an era that was marked by sexual constraint, a stringent code of conduct, and a low tolerance for criminality. The principles in this story, on the other hand, were considered scandalous and immoral at the time. "Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is an example of that literature which focused on sensual love and physical pleasure that undercuts Victorian aesthetics and conventional values. As a result, it is not considered an aesthetic work according to traditional Victorian standards." (Saeed and Sharif 2)

The Picture of Dorian Gray was written slowly and meticulously, with Wilde revising and refining the novel over a period of several years to create the final version that is now considered a classic of English literature. The novel went through multiple drafts and revisions, with Wilde making significant changes to the plot and characters along the way. The earliest version of the novel, which was serialized in Lippincott's Monthly Magazine in 1890, contained several passages that were deemed too scandalous for publication and were subsequently censored. Oscar Wilde handed the manuscript to the publisher and was convinced that he had done something great and new (Pearson 136). After the negative reception of the serialized version, Wilde extensively revised the novel and added new material, including a

Chapter One: A Literature Review on "The Picture of Dorian Gray" and Oscar Wilde's Theory of New Hedonism and Aestheticism

preface that defended his artistic choices and responded to his critics. The final version of the novel, published in book form in 1891, was significantly different from the original serialized version, both in terms of its plot and its tone.

The publication of the novel was met with a great deal of controversy and criticism from both literary critics and the general public. The Daily Chronicle even called it "a poisonous book" and "a tale spawned from the leprous literature of the French decadents" (qtd. in Ellmann 221), it was also called "brainless" and "vulgar" by The Athenaeum and they said that "the moral of the story is stupid and disgusting" (qtd. in Pearson 138). However, after the initial shock and controversy that surrounded the publication of "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*," some critics began to appreciate the novel's unique style and themes and praised Wilde's literary style and his willingness to challenge Victorian moral values. St. James's Gazette declared that "It is a remarkable performance, full of beauty and distinction and originality... *Dorian Gray* is one of the most perfect works of prose fiction in English literature" (1891) and New York Times praised Oscar Wilde's extraordinary personality saying that his keen wit, his cleverness in the paradox and the epigram, his brilliant conversation, his versatility, and his learning are not lacking in the pages of '*Dorian Gray*'. (1891)

1.3 The Theory of New Hedonism

The theory of new hedonism is a philosophical and ethical approach that emphasizes the pursuit of pleasure and happiness as the ultimate goal of human existence. It is based on the ancient Greek concept of hedonism, which holds that pleasure is the highest good.

New hedonism, however, differs from traditional hedonism for it emphasizes the importance of personal responsibility and individual freedom in the pursuit of pleasure. It encourages individuals to engage in experiences and activities that bring them joy and fulfilment, while

Chapter One: A Literature Review on "The Picture of Dorian Gray" and Oscar Wilde's Theory of New Hedonism and Aestheticism

also recognizing the potential consequences and balancing pleasure with other values such as health and well-being.

1.3.1 The Role of Pleasure

Advocates of new hedonism believe that pleasure plays a central role as the ultimate goal of human existence. The pursuit of pleasure and happiness is seen as a positive and valuable pursuit, and individuals are encouraged to seek out experiences and activities that bring them joy and fulfilment. Michel Onfray argues that "pleasure, the most noble goal of human existence, is not only the source of happiness, it is happiness itself" (27). However, new hedonism also emphasizes the importance of personal responsibility and individual freedom in the pursuit of pleasure. Individuals are encouraged to make informed choices and to consider the potential consequences of their actions, including the impact on their own well-being and that of others.

New hedonism also recognizes that pleasure is a subjective experience, and that different individuals have different preferences and experiences of pleasure. It therefore emphasizes the importance of diversity and acceptance, recognizing that there is no "right" way to pursue pleasure. According to Onfray "The diversity of pleasures, far from being a threat, constitutes the very condition for the flourishing of life. It is through the acceptance of others' pleasures that we can come to a better understanding of our own."(29)

Critics of new hedonism argue that a focus on pleasure can lead to a superficial and selfish approach to life, and that it may prioritize short-term pleasure over long-term well-being and fulfilment. However, proponents of new hedonism argue that pleasure and happiness are essential components of a fulfilling life, and that by prioritizing these values, individuals can lead more meaningful and satisfying lives. In his book *"The Politics of Happiness: On New*

Chapter One: A Literature Review on "The Picture of Dorian Gray" and Oscar Wilde's Theory of New Hedonism and Aestheticism

Hedonism" Onfray claims that "Pleasure, far from being an accessory or an epiphenomenon, constitutes the essence of life, its salt and its sugar, its what-for and its why-not." (4)

1.3.2 Criticism of Traditional Morality

In the theory of new hedonism, traditional morality is often criticized for its perceived limitations and restrictions on individual freedom and pleasure. Advocates of new hedonism argue that traditional morality, with its emphasis on duty, obligation, and sacrifice, can lead to a life that is dull, joyless, and unfulfilling.

One of the main criticisms of traditional morality in the context of new hedonism is its emphasis on self-denial and self-sacrifice. New hedonism views these as negative and damaging to an individual's well-being and happiness. "If pleasure is the ultimate goal of existence, the traditional and official philosophy and morality of our civilization are not only incapable of leading us to it, but are also, on the contrary, its worst enemy." (Onfray 3) According to this perspective, individuals should not be expected to sacrifice their own happiness for the sake of others or for some abstract moral principle.

Another criticism is that traditional morality often imposes strict rules and norms that are designed to control and limit human behaviour. According to Onfray, traditional morality that emphasizes duty and obligation is a rejection of life because it imposes an impersonal and abstract ideal that does not take into account individual needs and desires (26). New hedonism advocates for personal freedom and individual autonomy, arguing that individuals should be free to pursue pleasure in a way that is authentic and true to themselves, rather than being restricted by external rules or expectations.

Chapter One: A Literature Review on "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*" and Oscar Wilde's Theory of New Hedonism and Aestheticism

Furthermore, traditional morality often promotes an ascetic lifestyle, where individuals are encouraged to renounce worldly pleasures and focus on spiritual or intellectual pursuits. New hedonism, on the other hand, views pleasure as an essential component of a fulfilling life and encourages individuals to seek out experiences and activities that bring them joy and fulfilment. Onfray argues that the true hedonist challenges every form of asceticism, whether it be religious, philosophical, or political. He rejects it because he knows that every form of self-denial, whether it be for God, reason, or the nation, leads to an abdication of life. (10)

In conclusion, the criticism of traditional morality in the theory of new hedonism centres on its perceived limitations on individual freedom and the pursuit of pleasure. While traditional morality emphasizes duty, obligation, and sacrifice, new hedonism emphasizes personal freedom and individual autonomy. Whether this perspective is ultimately beneficial or harmful to society remains a subject of debate.

1.3.3 Individualism and Freedom

New hedonism is a philosophical doctrine that places a strong emphasis on pleasure as the ultimate goal of human existence. At the core of new hedonism is a strong emphasis on individualism and freedom, which are seen as essential components of a fulfilling and happy life.

In the context of new hedonism, individualism is understood as the belief that each individual should be free to pursue their own goals and desires, without interference or control from others. Onfray described new hedonism as a libertarianism that emphasizes the primacy of individual choice, self-fulfilment and pleasure. This includes the freedom to choose one's own path in life, to pursue one's own interests and passions, and to make one's own decisions about how to live. Freedom, in turn, is seen as a necessary condition for individualism and the pursuit

Chapter One: A Literature Review on "The Picture of Dorian Gray" and Oscar Wilde's Theory of New Hedonism and Aestheticism

of pleasure. Without freedom, individuals are unable to act on their desires and interests, and are instead constrained by external forces such as social norms, cultural expectations, or political institutions.

"The libertarianism of new hedonism does not stop at individualism, but also advocates the freedom of the individual in society." (Onfray 12). New hedonism therefore emphasizes the importance of creating a society that values individual freedom and autonomy. This includes advocating for political and social institutions that respect individual rights and freedoms, such as free speech, freedom of association, and freedom of conscience. At the same time, new hedonism recognizes that individualism and freedom must be balanced against the needs and desires of others. This requires an emphasis on mutual respect and tolerance, and a recognition of the diversity and pluralism of human experiences and desires.

"The danger of individualism and freedom is that they can lead to a society where everyone pursues their own pleasure and self-interest, with little regard for the common good or the well-being of others." (Bateman 150) Critics of new hedonism argue that a focus on individualism and freedom can lead to a selfish and hedonistic approach to life, which may prioritize short-term pleasure over long-term well-being and fulfilment. They also argue that a focus on pleasure can lead to a superficial and shallow approach to life, which may ignore important moral and ethical considerations.

However, proponents of new hedonism argue that "Individual freedom is the necessary condition for the pursuit of happiness" (Onfray 39), and that the pursuit of pleasure can be consistent with other important values, such as compassion and social responsibility. Ultimately, the role of individualism and freedom in new hedonism is a complex and nuanced

Chapter One: A Literature Review on "The Picture of Dorian Gray" and Oscar Wilde's Theory of New Hedonism and Aestheticism

issue, which requires careful consideration of the ways in which these values can be balanced against other considerations in pursuit of a happy and fulfilling life.

1.3.4 The Role of Aesthetics

New hedonism theory emphasizes the pursuit of pleasure as the ultimate goal of human existence. In this pursuit, aesthetics plays a significant role, as they contribute to the experience of pleasure in various ways. Aesthetics, in the context of new hedonism, refer to the sensory experiences that bring pleasure, such as art, music, food, and nature.

One of the key features of new hedonism is the celebration of individual freedom and experimentation. "Aesthetics offers a broad field of opportunity for experiencing the pleasures of the senses, for exploring and experimenting with the various forms of pleasure that they can provide" (Onfray 74). For example, through exploring different forms of art or trying new foods, individuals can expand their understanding and experiences of pleasure.

Furthermore, aesthetics is an essential component of the experience of pleasure. Aesthetically pleasing experiences engage the senses and can stimulate the release of neurotransmitters, such as dopamine, that contribute to the experience of pleasure. According to Onfray "The aesthetically pleasing experience engages the senses, opens up the imagination, and connects us to the world in a way that is both meaningful and pleasurable."(22). The beauty of nature, for instance, can provide a sense of calm and tranquillity, while a piece of music can evoke powerful emotions that contribute to the experience of pleasure.

Additionally, aesthetics plays a role in the creation of meaning and purpose in life. In new hedonism, pleasure is not only the ultimate goal but also the source of meaning and purpose in life. "Hedonism as a philosophy of life is not simply a matter of pursuing pleasure, but of

Chapter One: A Literature Review on "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*" and Oscar Wilde's Theory of New Hedonism and Aestheticism

creating meaning and purpose in life through the pursuit of beauty and aesthetic pleasure." (Onfray 17) Aesthetically pleasing experiences can create a sense of connection to something greater than oneself, providing individuals with a sense of purpose and meaning.

However, the pursuit of aesthetics in new hedonism is not without its criticisms. Some argue that a focus on aesthetics can lead to a superficial approach to pleasure, prioritizing sensory experiences over deeper forms of fulfillment and well-being. Furthermore, some argue that a focus on aesthetics can reinforce cultural biases and inequalities, as certain aesthetic experiences are deemed more valuable than others.

In conclusion, aesthetics plays a significant role in new hedonism theory by providing opportunities for experimentation, contributing to the experience of pleasure, and creating meaning and purpose in life. However, the pursuit of aesthetics in new hedonism should be balanced with a consideration of the potential consequences and a recognition of the diversity of aesthetic experiences.

1.4 Aestheticism and Its Correlation with Superficiality

Aestheticism is a philosophical and artistic movement that emerged in the late 19th century, emphasizing the importance of beauty and sensory experience over practical or moral considerations. This latter has often been accused of promoting superficiality and a lack of moral values in the pursuit of art and pleasure because of its emphasis on beauty and form.

1.4.1 The Aesthetic Movement (1860 – 1900)

Aestheticism emerged as a cultural and artistic movement in the late 19th century, primarily in Europe. It was a reaction against the Victorian era's strict moral codes, which emphasized practicality and usefulness over beauty and aesthetics. Aestheticism's focus on art for art's sake

Chapter One: A Literature Review on "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*" and Oscar Wilde's Theory of New Hedonism and Aestheticism

and the importance of individualism and self-expression helped shape the cultural and artistic landscape of the time.

1.4.1.1 The History of Aestheticism

The roots of the Aesthetic Movement can be traced back to the ideas of the French writer Charles Baudelaire, who celebrated beauty for its own sake and argued that art should not have a moral or social purpose. These ideas were later popularized in Britain by writers such as Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde.

In the 1860s and 1870s, a group of artists and designers in Britain began to embrace these ideas and formed the core of the Aesthetic Movement. They rejected the idea of art as a moral or social instrument, and instead celebrated the power of art to evoke emotions and stimulate the imagination. The movement had a significant impact on the decorative arts, fashion, and interior design, and influenced the development of Art Nouveau and other decorative art styles. Several prominent figures were associated with the movement, such as Oscar Wilde, James McNeill Whistler, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, contributed to its development through their works and their advocacy of its principles. Their works reflected the movement's emphasis on beauty, individualism, and the rejection of conventional norms.

1.4.1.2 Key Figures

Oscar Wilde's contributions to the Aesthetic Movement were significant in a number of ways. He was a major advocate for the movement, and he used his public platform to promote its principles and ideas. Wilde was a creative writer, and he wrote a number of essays, articles, and reviews that celebrated the importance of beauty, individualism, and pleasure in art and

Chapter One: A Literature Review on "The Picture of Dorian Gray" and Oscar Wilde's Theory of New Hedonism and Aestheticism

life. He also wrote a novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, that was seen as a seminal work of the movement.

Wilde saw the Aesthetic Movement as a philosophy that placed beauty, pleasure, and individualism above all else. In his essay *The Critic as Artist* Oscar Wilde described beauty and its symbolism by saying "Beauty has as many meanings as man has moods. Beauty is the symbol of symbols. Beauty reveals everything, because it expresses nothing. When it shows itself, it shows us the whole fiery-coloured world." (Wilde 129) This quote is an exploration of the idea of beauty and its significance in human experience. Wilde suggests that the meaning of beauty is not fixed or objective, but rather varies according to individual moods and perspectives. Beauty is, in a sense, a symbol that can evoke different emotions and associations in different people. He also emphasized the importance of pleasure in the Aesthetic Movement. He believed that the pursuit of pleasure and the enjoyment of beauty were essential to a fulfilling life. He wrote, "There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written or badly written. That is all." (Wilde 130) He believed that art should not be judged based on its moral content but rather on its aesthetic value. In addition to that Wilde's works celebrated the uniqueness and creativity of the individual. Stetz argued that "Wilde's writing was characterized by a radical individualism and an insistence on the importance of self-expression and self-realization." (463); Wilde believed that individuals should be free to express themselves creatively and to explore their own personal identities.

James McNeill Whistler another prominent figure in the Aesthetic Movement was an American-born artist who spent most of his career in Britain. He was a painter and printmaker who was known for his use of colour and his innovative techniques. His famous painting, "Whistler's Mother," is a prime example of his aesthetic style, which emphasized the importance of the visual experience and the beauty of form. He believed in the autonomy of

Chapter One: A Literature Review on "The Picture of Dorian Gray" and Oscar Wilde's Theory of New Hedonism and Aestheticism

art, which was a central principle of the Aesthetic Movement. He believed that art should be appreciated for its own sake, without any reference to moral, social or political considerations. In his Ten O'clock Lecture he reinforced this belief by saying that "Art should be independent of all claptrap—should stand alone [...] and appeal to the artistic sense of eye or ear, without confounding this with emotions entirely foreign to it, as devotion, pity, love, patriotism and the like." (99).

Whistler also emphasized the importance of beauty and aesthetic pleasure in art, arguing that art should be pleasurable both for the artist and for the viewer, according to him "The artist is not born to a life of misery. On the contrary, he is born to a life of pleasure. His work is his pleasure." (101)

Dante Gabriel Rossetti was a British painter, poet, and co-founder of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which was an influential art movement that preceded the Aesthetic Movement. Rossetti's works were marked by their romanticism and their focus on medieval and mythological themes. "Rossetti was one of the key figures of the Aesthetic Movement, and his art was characterized by a devotion to beauty, an interest in medieval and mythological subjects, and a rejection of the conventional artistic styles of his time" (Prettejohn 67). In his painting "*Beata Beatrix*," for example, he creates a dreamlike atmosphere that is rich in colour and texture. Similarly, in his poetry, Rossetti often uses vivid imagery to evoke sensory experiences, such as "*The Blessed Damozel*," which explored themes of love, death, and beauty. For instance, he describes the beauty of heaven in rich, sensory detail:

"And still she bowed herself and stooped,
Out of the circling charm;
Until her bosom must
have made,
The bar she leaned on warm,
And the lilies lay as if asleep,
Along her bended arm."

Chapter One: A Literature Review on "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*" and Oscar Wilde's Theory of New Hedonism and Aestheticism

This emphasis on beauty and sensory experience was central to Rossetti's aesthetic philosophy, which emphasized the importance of pleasure and sensory enjoyment. "Rossetti's poetry and art were instrumental in shaping the Aesthetic Movement's emphasis on beauty and individualism" (Stetz 89)

1.4.1.3 Principles and Characteristics

One of the central tenets of the Aesthetic Movement was a celebration of beauty in all forms. According to Charlotte Gere, "The Aesthetic Movement emphasized the importance of beauty in all aspects of life, from art and design to fashion and interiors" (Gere). This emphasis on beauty extended beyond traditional forms of art to encompass everyday objects, architecture, and even clothing. The movement sought to elevate the appreciation of beauty to a central position in society, arguing that the pursuit of beauty was a noble and worthwhile pursuit in and of itself.

At the same time, the Aesthetic Movement promoted individualism as a way to counteract the conformity and rigid social norms of the Victorian era. Its proponents believed that each individual had a unique perspective and creative vision that should be expressed freely, without regard for societal expectations or traditional norms. In his article on the Aesthetic Movement, Barlow argues that individualism was a central principle of the movement, as it emphasized "the importance of the individual's creative impulses over any external conventions, morals, or expectations" (36). This emphasis on individualism extended to the creation of art and design, with artists encouraged to experiment and innovate in their work.

The Aesthetic Movement also rejected the moral and social conventions of Victorian society, arguing that they were stifling and oppressive. According Barlow "What made the

Chapter One: A Literature Review on "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*" and Oscar Wilde's Theory of New Hedonism and Aestheticism

aesthetic movement so radical was its willingness to challenge not only the moral and social norms of Victorian England, but also the very foundations of artistic and literary tradition" (38). The movement's supporters believed that individuals should be free to pursue pleasure and happiness as they saw fit, without being constrained by religious or social norms. This rejection of traditional morality and social conventions was often seen as scandalous and subversive, and the movement's proponents were sometimes viewed as dangerous and radical.

In terms of aesthetics, the Aesthetic Movement favoured decorative art over functional design, with a particular emphasis on the use of exotic materials, intricate patterns, and vibrant colours. Rosenblum claims that the decorative arts, which had long been relegated to a secondary position in relation to the fine arts of painting and sculpture, had emerged as the primary focus of artistic and cultural aspiration (284). The movement also drew inspiration from a wide range of sources, including Japanese art and design, medieval art and architecture, and the natural world.

1.4.1.4 Influence and Legacy

One of the key ways in which the Aesthetic Movement influenced art and design was through its rejection of traditional artistic hierarchies. Prior to the movement, there was a strict division between fine art and decorative art, with fine art being considered more valuable and prestigious. The Aesthetic Movement challenged this distinction, valuing all forms of art equally and celebrating beauty in all its forms.

This approach had a significant impact on subsequent movements such as Art Nouveau, which emerged in the late 19th century and was characterized by its use of organic forms, sinuous lines, and decorative motifs. Like the Aesthetic Movement, Art Nouveau valued beauty

Chapter One: A Literature Review on "The Picture of Dorian Gray" and Oscar Wilde's Theory of New Hedonism and Aestheticism

and rejected traditional artistic hierarchies. It was also influenced by the Aesthetic Movement's interest in Eastern art and design, which it incorporated into its own style. According to Harrison and Wood "Art Nouveau was a composite style that drew together various tendencies of the time: the cult of the Gesamtkunstwerk, Symbolism, Japonisme, the Arts and Crafts Movement, the Aesthetic Movement and other late nineteenth-century reform movements." (232)

The Arts and Crafts Movement, which emerged in the late 19th century as a response to the industrialization of the arts, was also influenced by the Aesthetic Movement. Like the Aesthetic Movement, the Arts and Crafts Movement rejected the mass-produced and industrialized goods of the Victorian era and emphasized the value of handcrafted, individualized objects. It was also influenced by the Aesthetic Movement's emphasis on beauty and its rejection of traditional artistic hierarchies. Harrison and Wood claim that "The Arts and Crafts Movement can be seen as a response to the excesses of the Aesthetic Movement, with its emphasis on surface decoration and its lack of concern for social and ethical issues" (65)

Beyond its influence on subsequent movements, the Aesthetic Movement also had a significant impact on culture more broadly. " [Its] challenged traditional notions of art and beauty, opening up new possibilities for artistic expression and experimentation." (Harrison and Wood 307) It promoted new forms of artistic expression and challenged traditional social and cultural norms. It celebrated individualism and self-expression, encouraging people to pursue their own creative interests and passions. It also helped shape attitudes towards beauty and pleasure, encouraging people to value sensory experience and aesthetic pleasure.

Overall, the Aesthetic Movement was as a reaction against the strict moral and aesthetic codes of the Victorian era. It celebrated beauty, pleasure, and artistic self-expression, rejecting

Chapter One: A Literature Review on "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*" and Oscar Wilde's Theory of New Hedonism and Aestheticism

traditional distinctions between high and low art. The movement had a significant impact on art, design, and culture, promoting new forms of artistic expression such as Art Nouveau and the Arts and Crafts movement. Its emphasis on beauty, individualism, and a rejection of traditional norms continues to influence contemporary art and design.

1.4.2 Critics Reviews on Aestheticism

Aestheticism is an artistic and cultural movement that emerged in the late 19th century, emphasizing the importance of beauty, sensory experience, and personal expression in art and life. Aesthetes rejected traditional moral and social values and sought to create a new form of art that would be free from the constraints of convention and morality. Superficiality, on the other hand, refers to the quality of being concerned only with surface appearances or lacking depth, substance, or significance. In the context of art and culture, superficiality can be seen as a focus on form over content or a lack of intellectual engagement and meaning. Critics of aestheticism have often accused the movement of superficiality, arguing that its emphasis on beauty and sensory experience can come at the expense of deeper meaning and moral values. However, defenders of aestheticism argue that the intrinsic value of beauty and personal expression is meaningful in its own right, and reject the idea that aestheticism is inherently superficial.

1.4.2.1 Criticisms of Aestheticism

The relationship between aestheticism and superficiality is a topic that has been widely debated in art and cultural studies. Aestheticism, as a movement that emphasizes beauty and sensory experience in art and life, has often been criticized for its perceived lack of depth and substance. Some argue that the focus on surface-level appearance and form can come at the

Chapter One: A Literature Review on "The Picture of Dorian Gray" and Oscar Wilde's Theory of New Hedonism and Aestheticism

expense of deeper meaning and intellectual engagement, leading to accusations of superficiality.

The aesthetic movement was criticized by many intellectuals for promoting superficiality and indulging in pleasure rather than addressing serious issues. Two of the most notable critics of aestheticism were Matthew Arnold and F.R. Leavis, who saw it as a dangerous threat to culture and society.

Arnold, a prominent Victorian critic, believed that art should have a moral purpose and serve as a means of educating the public. He argued that aestheticism was a form of escapism that allowed people to avoid confronting the harsh realities of life. In his essay "*Culture and Anarchy*" (1869), Arnold criticized the aesthetic movement for promoting a culture of self-indulgence and individualism, rather than emphasizing the importance of collective values and social responsibility. He argued that self-indulgence breeds only feebleness and incapacity (Arnold 13). Arnold also claimed that the individualism which is opposed to culture is not the wholesome individualism once seen at work in Greece, and which may be seen at work now among the Japanese, but a diseased individualism (22).

Similarly, F.R. Leavis, a 20th-century literary critic, saw aestheticism as a threat to genuine culture and art. In his essay "*Mass Civilization and Minority Culture*" (1930), Leavis criticized the mass production of art and the commodification of culture. According to him "The whole tendency of mass production is towards the making of things uniform, and therefore towards a levelling-down" (Leavis 13). He believed that aestheticism was a form of consumerism that reduced art to a mere commodity, and that in itself is a symptom of a serious malady of the cultural life" (Leavis 15).

Chapter One: A Literature Review on "The Picture of Dorian Gray" and Oscar Wilde's Theory of New Hedonism and Aestheticism

Another prominent critic of aestheticism was William Morris, a leading figure in the Arts and Crafts Movement. Morris believed that art should serve a social purpose and rejected the notion of art for art's sake. He argued that aestheticism was a form of elitism that excluded the masses from the benefits of art and culture. In his essay "*The Beauty of Life*" (1880), The author stated that "Art made simply as a way of showing off, as a butt for the display of the skill of the artist, is no longer art at all, but a piece of ostentation, and if the skill is great enough to hide the poverty of the workmanship, it becomes a piece of imposture." (Morris 12) He criticized the aesthetic movement for promoting a superficial and artificial form of beauty, rather than emphasizing the natural and functional aspects of design.

T.S Eliot's famous poem "*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*" also critiques the superficiality and ennui of modern society, which can be seen as a response to the cultural context of aestheticism. It is a poem that criticizes the superficiality and alienation of modern society. The speaker, J. Alfred Prufrock, is a middle-aged man who is experiencing an existential crisis. He is plagued by self-doubt and insecurities, and is afraid to take action and make meaningful connections with others. The poem is filled with vivid imagery and metaphors that paint a picture of a world that is empty, sterile, and devoid of genuine emotion. Through Prufrock's internal monologue, Eliot exposes the superficiality and shallowness of modern life, and questions whether true connection and meaning can still be found in a world that values only appearance and social status. The poem remains a powerful critique of modern society, and a reminder of the importance of genuine human connection and meaningful relationships.

1.4.2.2 In Defence of Aestheticism

Aestheticism arose in the late 19th century as a reaction against Victorian morality and the Industrial Revolution, which were seen as oppressive and stifling to creativity. Proponents of

Chapter One: A Literature Review on "The Picture of Dorian Gray" and Oscar Wilde's Theory of New Hedonism and Aestheticism

aestheticism argued that art should be free from any external constraints and should be judged solely on its aesthetic qualities.

One of the most influential proponents of aestheticism was Walter Pater, an English essayist and critic. In his book, "*Studies in the History of the Renaissance*," Pater argued that art should be valued for its intrinsic beauty, rather than for any moral or social message. He believed that the aesthetic experience was the most important thing in life, and that it had the power to transform and enrich the soul. Pater wrote, "To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life" (191).

Another important advocate of aestheticism was Oscar Wilde, a writer and playwright. In his essay, "*The Critic as Artist*," Wilde argued that art should be valued for its own sake, and that the critic's job was to appreciate and interpret it, rather than to judge it based on moral or social standards. Wilde believed that art was the highest form of human expression, and that it had the power to transcend the limitations of everyday life. He wrote, "The artist is the creator of beautiful things...There is no such thing as a moral or immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all" (1407).

James McNeill Whistler, an American artist who lived in England, was also closely associated with the aesthetic movement. In his famous "*Ten O'Clock Lecture*," Whistler argued that art should be valued for its aesthetic qualities, and that the artist's job was to create beauty, rather than to convey a message or make a statement. He famously said, "Nature contains the elements, in colour and form, of all pictures, as the keyboard contains the notes of all music. But the artist is born to pick, and choose, and group with science, these elements, that the result may be beautiful" (109).

Chapter One: A Literature Review on "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*" and Oscar Wilde's Theory of New Hedonism and Aestheticism

In conclusion, the defence of aestheticism is the argument that art should be valued for its own sake, rather than for any moral or social message. Proponents of aestheticism argue that the aesthetic experience is the most important thing in life, and that art has the power to transform and enrich the soul. Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde, and James McNeill Whistler were all important advocates of aestheticism, and their works continue to inspire and influence artists and thinkers today.

1.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter provided a comprehensive overview of Oscar Wilde's life as well as his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and the theories related to it. It examined the life and works of Oscar Wilde, including his controversial beliefs and behaviors that challenged Victorian society.

The study delved into the theory of new hedonism and its correlation with aestheticism, highlighting the origins, key principles, and critical reception of these philosophical and artistic movements. By exploring these theories, it aimed to shed light on the connection between superficiality and the pursuit of pleasure, as well as the elevation of beauty and art above moral considerations.

The primary goal of this study was to provide a comprehensive understanding of Oscar Wilde's life and the cultural and intellectual landscape that shaped his work. By analysing the existing research and data, it aimed to contribute to a more nuanced and informed perspective of Wilde's time, examining the tensions between societal norms and individual freedom, the allure of superficiality, and the consequences of unchecked indulgence.

Chapter One: A Literature Review on "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*" and Oscar Wilde's Theory of New Hedonism and Aestheticism

At last, this literature review has laid the groundwork for further exploration and analysis of superficiality in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. It has offered insights into the life and beliefs of Oscar Wilde, as well as the philosophical and artistic movements that influenced his work.

**Chapter Two: Literary
Analysis of the Superficial
Nature in *The Picture of
Dorian Gray***

Chapter Two: Literary Analysis of the Superficial Nature in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Chapter Two: Literary Analysis of the Superficial Nature in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

2.1 Introduction

Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a Victorian novel that explores the corruption of innocence, the dangers of aestheticism, and the consequences of unchecked desire. Wilde's portrayal of the persona of Dorian Grey criticises the superficiality and moral decadence of Victorian society, exposing the dark truth of the era's obsession with beauty and pleasure.

In this chapter, we will examine *The Picture of Dorian Gray's* themes of corruption, aestheticism, and morality, as well as how Wilde's use of symbolism and narrative structure adds to the novel's ongoing literary influence. At first, we will begin by analysing the character of Dorian Gray and how he represents the tensions between the pursuit of pleasure and the decline of morality in Victorian society. Specifically, the focus will be on the theme of physical appearance and how it plays a role in Dorian's character development. We will explore how his obsession with beauty and youth leads to his downfall and how his portrait acts as a visual representation of his moral decay.

Furthermore, we will examine how the novel critiques the aestheticism movement of the late 19th century and its tension with traditional morality. We will analyse how Dorian's pursuit of pleasure and his rejection of traditional moral values reflect the larger societal shift towards individualism and self-gratification.

Finally, we will explore how Dorian's death reflects the moral decay of Victorian society and its obsession with beauty and pleasure. By examining the themes of physical appearance, aestheticism vs morality, and the pursuit of pleasure, we aim to show how *The Picture of*

Chapter Two: Literary Analysis of the Superficial Nature in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Dorian Gray offers a critique of the values and attitudes of Victorian society while also offering insights into the human condition.

2.2 Dorian Gray vs His character

The character of Dorian Gray in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Grey* is a multifaceted individual who represents the contradictions in Victorian society between the pursuit of pleasure and the decay of morals. Dorian is initially portrayed as a gorgeous and innocent young man, but as the narrative goes, his quest for pleasure and beauty consumes him.

2.2.1 Physical Appearance vs. Inner Character

The difference between Dorian Gray's physical appearance and his inner nature is a central theme in "*The Picture of Dorian Grey*." Dorian is shown as a stunningly gorgeous and youthful man with a "face like a Greek god" (Chapter 1). His true inner nature, however, is revealed to be morally corrupt, egotistical, and hedonistic as the novel progresses. Gargano described him as "a man who is physically beautiful, but whose inner life is diseased and corrupt" (282). The contrast between his physical beauty and inner ugliness is emphasised in a number of ways throughout the novel.

For example, Dorian is startled by the difference between his portrait's ugliness and his own beauty when he first sees it. He says, "How sad it is! I shall grow old, and horrible, and dreadful. But this picture will remain always young... If it were only the other way!" (Chapter 2). This comment exhibits Dorian's view of his physical attractiveness as a defining feature of his identity, as well as his fear of the decay and ugliness that comes with age. "For [him], the fear of the portrait's aging is compounded by his fear of losing the beauty and youth he has come to identify with himself"(Gargano 291). His desire to remain forever young and beautiful sets him on the path towards corruption, as he becomes willing to do anything to maintain his appearance.

Chapter Two: Literary Analysis of the Superficial Nature in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

As the novel progresses, "Dorian's appearance never changes, but his portrait is a visible manifestation of the moral rot that is taking place inside him" (Gargano 290). Even when his spirit grows twisted and evil, he maintains his youthful appearance. This is demonstrated when he enters an opium den and is described as having a "face like a fine mask" that conceals his true emotions (Chapter 11). The difference between his outward look and his inner self becomes even more evident towards the end of the story, when he becomes more paranoid and his face takes on a "look of fear" (Chapter 19).

At last, the contrast between Dorian's physical appearance and inner character is a key element of "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*." The novel explores how Dorian's obsession with his appearance leads him down a path of moral decay, and how his outward beauty masks his inner ugliness. "Dorian's refusal to acknowledge the connection between his inner life and his outer appearance...is an essential part of his damnation" (Gargano 291). Through his story, the novel comments on the dangers of superficiality and the importance of inner morality over physical appearance.

2.2.2 The Role of Influence and The Nature of Beauty

In "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*," the theme of influence and the nature of beauty are central to the development of the character and appearance of Dorian Gray. The novel explores the dangers of allowing external forces to shape one's identity and the corrupting influence of an obsession with physical beauty.

At the beginning of the novel, Dorian is a young and innocent man, influenced by the ideals of his friend Lord Henry Wotton such as when he says "To me, Beauty is the wonder of wonders. It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances." (Chapter 2). Lord Henry adopts a philosophy of hedonism and encourages Dorian to pursue pleasure and beauty above all else. This influence takes hold of Dorian, leading him down a path of moral decay and

Chapter Two: Literary Analysis of the Superficial Nature in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

corruption. In his article *The Picture of Dorian Gray: The Tragedy of Beauty* Lu claims that "Influence, like art, has the power to corrupt as well as to inspire. Dorian Gray's tragedy lies in his being an innocent, vulnerable soul at the mercy of a corrupted mentor." (33). Due to this influence Dorian becomes increasingly obsessed with his own physical appearance, wishing that he could remain forever young and beautiful. This obsession with external beauty leads him to make a Faustian bargain, trading his soul for eternal youth and beauty.

As the novel progresses, Dorian's appearance becomes increasingly disconnected from his inner character. He continues to look young and beautiful, even as his soul becomes increasingly twisted and corrupt. "Dorian is a warning of the danger of losing one's soul to the pursuit of physical beauty and pleasure, and the necessity of finding meaning and morality in life." (Lu 38). The disconnect between Dorian's appearance and inner character is highlighted in a number of ways throughout the novel, such as when Dorian sees his portrait for the first time and is struck by the contrast between its ugliness and his own beauty.

The novel ultimately suggests that the nature of beauty is subjective and that obsession with physical beauty can lead to moral decay. This is represented in chapter 20 when Lord Henry is observing a group of people listening to a preacher who asked "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and lose his own soul?" (Chapter 20) This quote, taken from the Bible, speaks to the novel's central theme of the dangers of allowing external influences shape one's identity and the importance of inner morality. According to Lu "The novel suggests that true beauty lies not in physical perfection, but in the goodness of one's soul, and that obsession with external beauty can lead to moral decay". Dorian's desire to remain young and beautiful at any cost is ultimately what leads to his downfall, as he becomes increasingly isolated and paranoid. In the end, it is only through confronting the true nature of his soul that he is able to find redemption.

Chapter Two: Literary Analysis of the Superficial Nature in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

In conclusion, "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*" explores the role of influence and the nature of beauty in shaping the character and appearance of Dorian Gray. The novel warns against the dangers of allowing external forces to define one's identity and the corrupting influence of an obsession with physical beauty. Through Dorian's story, the novel emphasizes the importance of inner morality over external appearances and suggests that true beauty lies not in physical perfection, but in the goodness of one's soul.

2.2.3 Dorian's True Character and The Impact of The Portrait on Him

In "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*," Oscar Wilde explores the concept of a person's true character and the impact of external influences on their behaviour. "The novel suggests that external beauty and social status are not reliable indicators of a person's true character and that a person's inner life is ultimately more important" (Helfer). Dorian Gray is a young and handsome man whose true character is hidden behind his façade of beauty and charm. However, when he commissions a portrait of himself, he unknowingly unleashes a force that will ultimately reveal his true nature.

Initially, Dorian is depicted as a young man of pure heart and innocence. However, as he becomes more deeply involved with Lord Henry and his hedonistic philosophy, his true character begins to emerge. His selfishness, vanity, and cruelty are revealed, and he becomes increasingly obsessed with his own beauty and youth. In his book *Oscar Wilde and Modern Culture: The Making of a Legend* Bristow describes Dorian as "the character who seeks to retain the beauty of youth, is in danger of losing his soul and of becoming a devilish figure, consumed with lust and pride" (44).

The portrait that Dorian commissions is a reflection of his true character, and as he descends further into moral decay, it becomes increasingly grotesque and disfigured. "Wilde uses the portrait as a symbol of the corrupting influence of external forces on a person's true character,

Chapter Two: Literary Analysis of the Superficial Nature in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

suggesting that a focus on external beauty and social status can have a corrosive effect on one's inner life" (Bristow 120). The true ugliness of Dorian's soul is revealed through the portrait as he becomes more deeply involved with Lord Henry and his decadent lifestyle.

One of the most important quotes in the novel come from Dorian himself when he says, "I am jealous of everything whose beauty does not die. I am jealous of the portrait you have painted of me. Why should it keep what I must lose? Every moment that passes takes something from me and gives something to it" (Chapter 2). This quote highlights Dorian's obsession with external beauty and his fear of growing old and losing his youthful appearance. According to Bristow, "Dorian's realization of the portrait's impact on him marks a turning point in his character development, as he begins to confront the consequences of his actions and the true nature of his soul" (Bristow 129). It also reveals his growing awareness of the impact that the portrait is having on him.

Another quote that emphasizes the impact of the portrait on Dorian's true character comes from Chapter 10: "It was the portrait that had done everything. It had made him more cruel, more wicked, more devilish than he had ever been. It had given him a face that was like a mask. Hidden behind it, he could do anything he liked, anything" (Chapter 10). This quote highlights the portrait's transformative power over Dorian and the way in which it has allowed him to indulge in his darkest desires without fear of consequence. Bristow claims that Dorian's obsession with the portrait reveals his true character, and the portrait becomes a symbol of his corruption (77).

In conclusion, "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*" is a cautionary tale about the dangers of allowing external influences to shape one's true character. Dorian's obsession with external beauty and his Faustian bargain ultimately led to his moral decay, and the portrait serves as a powerful symbol of the impact that external influences can have on a person's true nature. The

Chapter Two: Literary Analysis of the Superficial Nature in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

novel suggests that true beauty lies not in physical perfection, but in inner goodness, and that the pursuit of external beauty at any cost can lead to one's downfall.

2.3 The Issue of Physical Appearance and The Deterioration of Society's Values in The Novel

The issue of physical appearance and the deterioration of society's values are central themes in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Wilde criticises Victorian society's shallow and superficial values through the portrayal of Dorian Gray and his fixation with beauty and youth. The story depicts a society obsessed with looks and status, and where moral deterioration and corruption are frequently masked behind a facade of respectability. *The Picture of Dorian Grey* delivers a cautionary tale about the dangers of irrational lust and the necessity for a deeper sense of morality and purpose in life by exploring the destructive force of vanity and the moral decay that results from a life spent purely for pleasure.

2.3.1 The Obsession with Physical Beauty

The theme of physical beauty is one of the main themes in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The novel depicts a society that places a great emphasis on physical beauty, often valuing it over other qualities such as morality, intelligence, or kindness. Through the character of Dorian Gray and his mentor Lord Henry Wotton, Wilde portrays the danger of valuing physical beauty over morality and inner values. As Dorian becomes more obsessed with his appearance, he becomes increasingly immoral and corrupt, ultimately leading to a loss of his soul.

Throughout the novel, the characters are shown to be obsessed with physical beauty. Lord Henry, a close friend of Dorian's, is the main proponent of this view. He says, "It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances." (Chapter 2). This quote shows how society values physical beauty over other qualities, such as intelligence or kindness. It suggests that people are more concerned with how others look than who they truly are on the inside. As a

Chapter Two: Literary Analysis of the Superficial Nature in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

result, individuals may feel pressured to maintain a certain physical appearance, even if it means sacrificing their morals or values. According to Arnold "The novel is a study of a society that places far too much value on superficial appearances, and the danger that arises when that sort of thinking becomes widespread." (32).

Lord Henry also emphasizes the importance of youth and beauty in society. He says, "Youth is the one thing worth having." (Chapter 1) This quote shows how people are willing to do anything to stay young and beautiful, even if it means making a deal with the devil. It highlights the fact that society values physical appearance above all else, which can lead to the neglect of other important qualities such as wisdom, experience, and character. Arnold suggests that the pursuit of youth and beauty is seen as a dangerous and corrupting force in the novel, he also adds that according to Wilde the quest for eternal youth and beauty can only lead to corruption and ruin (31).

In addition, Lord Henry suggests that society values style over substance. He says, "There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all." (Chapter 2). Arnold also claims that in the novel style had taken precedence over substance, and a person's worth was measured by his or her ability to charm and delight (31). This quote shows how people are more interested in appearances than in the actual content of a book or a person. It suggests that individuals may be judged based on their outward appearance rather than their inner qualities.

Another quote from Lord Henry that highlights the obsession with physical beauty is, "Nowadays people know the price of everything and the value of nothing." (Chapter 3). In this quote "Wilde portrays a society that places a premium on superficial qualities such as beauty and charm while ignoring the importance of morality and character" (Arnold 31), he also emphasizes how society has become obsessed with material possessions and physical beauty,

Chapter Two: Literary Analysis of the Superficial Nature in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

and how people have lost sight of what truly matters in life. The quote shows how people may be more concerned with the latest fashion trends or beauty products than with developing meaningful relationships or pursuing their passions.

Finally, "Dorian's fixation on his own beauty and the value of youth and physical perfection has led him down a dangerous path, one that has destroyed his soul and ultimately led to his downfall" (Arnold 32). In the novel Dorian says, "The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it." (Chapter 3) This quote demonstrates how his obsession with physical beauty has led him down a dangerous path. He is willing to do whatever it takes to maintain his youthful appearance, even if it means giving into temptation. This quote highlights the fact that the obsession with physical beauty can have dangerous consequences, both for the individual and for society as a whole.

In conclusion, "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*" shows how the obsession with physical beauty can lead to the deterioration of society's values. The novel emphasizes how people are more interested in appearances than in substance, and how this can have dangerous consequences. Through the use of various quotes from the novel, a better understanding of this theme and its implications for society was provided. It is important for individuals to recognize that physical appearance is not the only measure of a person's worth, and that true beauty lies within.

2.3.2 The Decay of Society's Values and The Corruption of Youth

Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* explores the theme of the decay of society's values and the corruption of youth through the story of Dorian Gray, a young and handsome man who becomes obsessed with his own appearance and indulges in a hedonistic lifestyle. As Dorian becomes more corrupted by his pursuit of pleasure, the society around him also decays, reflecting the novel's central theme.

Chapter Two: Literary Analysis of the Superficial Nature in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Lord Henry Wotton, a hedonistic aristocrat who believes that beauty and pleasure are the only things worth pursuing in life, is a key character who represents the decay of society's values. He encourages Dorian to embrace the same values and lifestyle, which ultimately leads Dorian down a path of moral decay and corruption. David Halperin claims that Lord Henry understands the power of suggestion, and his influence on Dorian Gray is thus a consequence of his ability to shape the young man's attitudes, tastes, and desires through the act of conversation (8). Lord Henry's influence on Dorian is evident when he says, "There is no such thing as a good influence, Mr. Gray. All influence is immoral--immoral from the scientific point of view" (Chapter 2).

As Dorian becomes more corrupt, he engages in vices such as opium use, gambling, and even murder. His descent into moral decay is reflected in his growing obsession with his portrait, which begins to age and show the physical decay that Dorian himself does not. Halperin writes that "Dorian's increasing moral decay is reflected in his growing obsession with his portrait, which becomes a kind of map of his corruption" (37). When he first sees the portrait after committing his first murder, he remarks, "It had altered already, and would alter further. Its gold would wither into grey. Its red and white roses would die. For every sin that he committed, a stain would fleck and wreck its fairness" (Chapter 8).

The novel also explores how the pursuit of pleasure and beauty can corrupt youth. Dorian Gray is an innocent and impressionable young man at the beginning of the novel, but as he becomes more obsessed with his appearance and indulges in the pleasures of life, he becomes increasingly immoral and corrupt. His actions have a ripple effect on those around him, ultimately leading to their destruction. According to Halperin Wilde exposes the hypocrisy and moral decay that underlie the veneer of respectability in Victorian society through the character

Chapter Two: Literary Analysis of the Superficial Nature in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

of Dorian Gray (10). The novel indicates that the hedonistic lifestyle can corrupt even the most innocent of souls and lead them astray from the path of moral values.

Furthermore, the novel suggests that the decay of society's values can lead to the corruption of youth. "Wilde argues that it is the hypocrisy of society that leads to the corruption of youth, that it is the discrepancy between a society's purported values and its actual behaviour that corrupts youth, making it impossible for them to develop an ethical sense of their own" (Halperin 253). Dorian's association with the hedonistic aristocracy and Lord Henry's influence shapes his values and actions, leading him towards moral decay and corruption. Wilde writes, "He felt that the whole system of society was a system of delusions, a mere façade. The things that one had cared for were nothings, the things that one had not cared for were everything" (Chapter 11).

In conclusion, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* serves as a warning about the dangers of valuing pleasure and beauty over morality and the need to cultivate a sense of compassion and responsibility towards others. The novel's characters illustrate how the pursuit of pleasure and beauty at any cost can lead to moral decay and the corruption of youth, reminding us of the importance of holding onto our values and remaining mindful of our responsibilities towards others.

2.4 Aestheticism vs Morality

Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* examines the contradictions between aestheticism and morality in Victorian society. Aestheticism was a late-nineteenth-century movement that emphasised beauty, pleasure, and sensory experience over traditional moral principles. Wilde, a key figure in the aesthetic movement, used *The Picture of Dorian Grey* to criticise the movement's excesses and to highlight the darker side of its philosophy. He exposes the consequences of abandoning traditional morality in favour of an aesthetic vision through the

Chapter Two: Literary Analysis of the Superficial Nature in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

figure of Dorian Grey. The work finally indicates that, while beauty and pleasure are tempting, they can lead to moral deterioration and spiritual corruption if sought at the expense of ethical values.

2.4.1 The Conflict Between Aestheticism and Morality

In Oscar Wilde's "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*," the conflict between Aestheticism and Morality is an important theme that drives the narrative. The novel explores the tension between the pursuit of beauty and the importance of morality, ultimately questioning whether the two can coexist.

One of the most striking examples of this conflict is seen in Dorian Gray's own internal struggle between his desire for beauty and his conscience. When Dorian first sees his portrait, he is struck by its beauty and becomes obsessed with the idea of staying young and beautiful forever. "Dorian's lack of morality becomes increasingly obvious as the novel progresses, and he becomes more and more consumed by his own desire for beauty" (Smith 776). In the novel Dorian declares, "If it were only the other way! If the picture could change, and I could be always stay what I am now!" (Chapter 3). This desire for eternal youth and beauty becomes the driving force behind his actions, leading him down a path of moral decay.

As Dorian becomes more immersed in the world of Aestheticism, he begins to reject the moral values that he was once taught. He states, "To get back my youth I would do anything in the world, except take exercise, get up early, or be respectable" (Chapter 3). Smith notes that "Dorian seems to reject conventional morality in favour of a philosophy of pleasure seeking and aestheticism" (Smith 770). He becomes increasingly reckless, indulging in vice and pleasure without regard for the consequences. However, as he continues on this path, he begins to see the toll that his actions have taken on his soul, and he becomes haunted by the ugliness that is reflected in his portrait.

Chapter Two: Literary Analysis of the Superficial Nature in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Ultimately, the conflict between Aestheticism and Morality comes to a head when Dorian is forced to confront the consequences of his actions. Smith claims that "In the end, the portrait shows Dorian that his aestheticism is not justifiable and that he has lived his life in pursuit of pleasure at the expense of his own soul" (Smith 774). He realizes that his pursuit of beauty and pleasure has come at a great cost, and that he has betrayed his own values and those of society. In a moment of realization, he declares, "I have sold my soul for a shadow. I have bartered my life for a price" (Chapter 20).

Through the character of Dorian Gray, Wilde highlights the dangers of prioritizing beauty and pleasure above morality. He suggests that while there is value in the pursuit of beauty, it must be tempered by a sense of responsibility and moral obligation. In this way, the novel serves as a cautionary tale, warning against the dangers of excess and the importance of maintaining a balance between the pursuit of beauty and the values of society.

2.4.2 The Role of Art and The Dangers of Excess

In Oscar Wilde's "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*," the novel raises questions about the role of art in society and the dangers of excess. These themes are interrelated, as the novel suggests that while art has the power to inspire and uplift, it can also be dangerous when it is taken to excess.

One of the key questions that the novel raises is whether art should have a moral purpose. This question is explored through the character of Basil Hallward, an artist who believes that art should be beautiful and inspiring, but also moral. He states, "I won't exhibit this picture. I tell you, Harry, I won't exhibit it. The world shall see it when I am dead and forgotten" (Chapter 2). "For him, art is a means to create an ideal world, to transform reality into something perfect, to reveal the beauty and truth of existence" (Zehnalová 79). Basil's belief in the moral purpose

Chapter Two: Literary Analysis of the Superficial Nature in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

of art stands in contrast to Dorian Gray's embrace of Aestheticism, which holds that art should be valued for its own sake, rather than for any moral purpose.

The conflict between Basil and Dorian over the role of art highlights the tension between the pursuit of beauty and the importance of morality. However, the novel ultimately suggests that art can have both a moral purpose and a purely aesthetic one. Zehnalová claims that "art has both a moral purpose and a purely aesthetic one. On the one hand, art can be used to inspire moral action or to critique immoral behaviour. On the other hand, art can simply exist for its own beauty or aesthetic pleasure" (80). As Wilde writes, "The artist is the creator of beautiful things. To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim" (Chapter 1).

At the same time, the novel also serves as a warning against the dangers of excess. "Dorian's pursuit of beauty without moral guidance is what leads to his downfall. For beauty becomes an end in itself, rather than a means to an end, and this excessive focus on external appearances leads to moral corruption" (Mellown 24). Dorian becomes increasingly reckless and immoral as he becomes more enamoured with his own beauty. He indulges in vice and pleasure without regard for the consequences, and ultimately becomes consumed by his own desires. As Wilde writes, "He was a master of the overstatement. His wit was often coarse, his satire clumsy" (Chapter 14).

Through the character of Dorian Gray, Wilde suggests that the pursuit of beauty and pleasure must be balanced with a sense of morality and responsibility. The novel warns against the dangers of excess, suggesting that while there is value in the pursuit of beauty, it must be tempered by a sense of responsibility and a recognition of the consequences of one's actions.

2.5 The Pursuit of Pleasure and The Death of Dorian Gray

The novel *The Picture of Dorian Grey* tackles the implications of unrestricted hedonism and the risks of living a life entirely for pleasure, and the pursuit of pleasure is a key theme. The

Chapter Two: Literary Analysis of the Superficial Nature in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

novel's protagonist, Dorian Grey, is captivated by his quest for pleasure and beauty, which leads him down a dark path of moral decay and depravity. Dorian gets increasingly alienated from people around him as he gets entangled in his own web of dishonesty and infidelity, eventually leading to his own demise. Wilde's story of Dorian delivers a warning tale about the dangers of a life lived only for pleasure, as well as the potential consequences that might follow when one's pursuit of pleasure becomes an obsession.

2.5.1 Dangers of Hedonism and Consequences of Vanity

Oscar Wilde's novel "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*" presents a cautionary tale about the dangers of hedonism and the consequences of vanity. The novel's protagonist, Dorian Gray, is a beautiful and wealthy young man who becomes obsessed with pleasure and beauty. He pursues a life of hedonism, believing that pleasure is the only thing worth pursuing. However, his pursuit of pleasure leads him down a dark path, and he ultimately suffers the consequences of his actions.

One of the major themes of the novel is the danger of hedonism. Dorian becomes obsessed with pleasure and beauty, and he begins to believe that they are the only things that matter in life. He says, "I adore simple pleasures. They are the last refuge of the complex" (Chapter 1). Dorian is not satisfied with simple pleasures, however. He becomes addicted to more and more extreme forms of pleasure, including opium and other drugs. Brannigan claims that "For Dorian, beauty is not something to be admired from afar, but something to be possessed, experienced, consumed" (465). He also becomes involved in a number of illicit relationships, including a homosexual relationship with his friend Basil.

Dorian's pursuit of pleasure leads him to commit a number of immoral and unethical acts. He becomes increasingly callous and cruel, and he begins to take pleasure in the suffering of others. He says, "I like to watch it [pain]. I know you are selfish, but that is a survival trait. I

Chapter Two: Literary Analysis of the Superficial Nature in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

like to see it [pain]" (Chapter 18). "The more Dorian indulges in his pleasures, the less he is able to empathize with others, and the less he is able to see the consequences of his actions" (Brannigan 457). Dorian's hedonism causes him to lose his moral compass, and he becomes incapable of feeling empathy or compassion for others.

Vanity, or excessive pride in one's appearance or achievements, is another theme that runs throughout the novel. Dorian Gray, initially praised for his beauty and charm, becomes increasingly obsessed with his own image. According to Brannigan "It is Lord Henry who sows the seeds of corruption and self-destruction in Dorian, who moulds him into a vain and selfish aesthete, and who ultimately brings about his downfall" (458). He encourages him to view himself as a work of art, stating that "the only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it... Your picture has taught me that... I am jealous of the portrait you have painted of me. Why should it keep what I must lose?" (Chapter 2). This desire to preserve his beauty at all costs ultimately leads to Dorian's downfall.

As Dorian's moral decay becomes increasingly apparent in his portrait, he becomes increasingly desperate to hide the evidence of his corruption. "Ultimately, [his] obsession with preserving his beautiful image drives him to murder. He is so afraid of losing his youth and beauty that he is willing to kill to protect it. His hedonism has consumed him, and in the end, he is left with nothing but a portrait of his corrupted soul." (Brannigan 462) In the end, it is Dorian's own vanity that leads to his undoing, as he becomes consumed by his fear of being exposed and destroyed.

Through the character of Dorian Gray, Oscar Wilde exposes the dangers of hedonism and the consequences of vanity. The pursuit of pleasure without regard for morality or consequences ultimately leads to self-destruction, as Dorian's physical appearance remains unchanged while his soul becomes increasingly corrupted. The pursuit of beauty and youth at all costs leads to

Chapter Two: Literary Analysis of the Superficial Nature in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

a shallow and superficial worldview, one that values appearance over substance and ultimately leads to tragedy. "Wilde's *Dorian Gray* is thus a parable of the hedonistic lifestyle: hedonism is destructive because it destroys the self, because it ultimately destroys the very pleasures it seeks" (Brannigan 458).

In conclusion, Dorian Gray's pursuit of pleasure leads him down a dark path, causing him to lose his moral compass and become increasingly cruel and callous. His obsession with beauty and vanity blinds him to the fact that his actions have consequences, and he ultimately suffers the ultimate price for his sins. The novel serves as a reminder that our actions have consequences and that we must be mindful of the choices we make in life.

2.5.2 The Corruption of Innocence

The Picture of Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde explores the corruption of innocence. Through the story of the titular character, Wilde depicts the gradual decay of an innocent and pure soul as it becomes consumed by hedonism and vanity.

At the beginning of the novel, Dorian Gray is portrayed as a young and innocent man, untouched by the corruption of the world around him. "Dorian's initial innocence is emphasized through his youthful naivety and his lack of experience in the world" (Jenkins 245). He is described as having "the simple and beautiful nature of a child" (Chapter 2) and is admired for his youth and innocence by the artist Basil Hallward, who becomes infatuated with him and paints his portrait. However, as Dorian becomes increasingly exposed to the decadence and indulgence of the upper-class society he moves in, his innocence begins to erode.

One of the first signs of Dorian's corruption is his growing fascination with hedonism. He becomes enamoured with the idea of indulging in pleasure without any thought for the consequences. His friend, Lord Henry Wotton, encourages him to embrace this worldview, telling him that "the only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it" (Chapter 2). "Dorian's

Chapter Two: Literary Analysis of the Superficial Nature in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

obsession with beauty and pleasure blinds him to the consequences of his actions, and he becomes increasingly callous and cruel as he indulges in his vices" (Jenkins 246). As he gets more involved in this lifestyle, his innocence and purity begin to give way to a darker and more cynical outlook on life.

This corruption of innocence is further illustrated through Dorian's portrait. At first, the portrait is a perfect representation of his youthful beauty and innocence, but as he becomes more corrupt, the portrait begins to reflect his true inner self. Jenkins notes that "The portrait functions as a metaphor for the inner corruption of Dorian's soul, which remains hidden from the outside world but is visible to himself alone" (245). The painting becomes increasingly grotesque and distorted, reflecting the corruption and depravity of Dorian's soul.

As Dorian becomes more consumed by his hedonistic pursuits, he also becomes increasingly vain and narcissistic. He becomes obsessed with his own beauty, believing it to be the key to his happiness and success. Lord Henry reinforces this belief, telling him that "it is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances" (Chapter 3). This obsession with his own appearance leads Dorian to engage in increasingly dangerous and immoral behaviour in order to maintain his youthful looks. According to Jenkins "Dorian's narcissism is what ultimately leads to his downfall, as he becomes consumed by his own image" (246).

The corruption of innocence is further illustrated through the character of Sybil Vane, a young actress who falls in love with Dorian. Like Dorian at the beginning of the novel, Sybil is pure and innocent, untouched by the corruption of the world around her. However, as Dorian becomes more consumed by his own vanity and hedonism, he loses interest in Sybil, causing her to become disillusioned and distraught. She eventually takes her own life, marking a turning point in the novel as Dorian begins to realize the true extent of his corruption. Jenkins claims that "Sybil Vane represents the ultimate embodiment of innocence in the novel, and her

Chapter Two: Literary Analysis of the Superficial Nature in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

corruption and eventual demise serve as a powerful commentary on the dangers of the aesthetic lifestyle" (245).

Through the character of Dorian Gray, Oscar Wilde illustrates the corruption of innocence and the destructive effects of hedonism and vanity. The decay of Dorian's soul is reflected in the decay of his portrait, "The portrait serves as a physical manifestation of Dorian's moral decay, and its increasingly grotesque appearance reflects the corruption of his inner self" (Jenkins 246). The tragic fate of Sybil Vane serves as a warning against the dangers of pursuing pleasure and beauty at the expense of morality and human connection. "In many ways, Sybil's fate is a metaphor for the fate of art in Wilde's society, which was often seen as corrupting and dangerous" (Jenkins 247)

In the end, Dorian realizes the true nature of his corruption and is consumed by his own guilt and despair. As he looks upon his portrait, he sees not only the reflection of his own depravity, but also the reflection of his lost innocence. "Ultimately, Dorian's corruption is not just about the portrait or his physical appearance; it is a corruption of his very soul. He becomes so consumed by his own vanity and hedonism that he loses sight of what is truly important in life." (Jenkins 247) Wilde's novel serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of maintaining one's purity and morality in the face of temptation and corruption. As Lord Henry himself reflects, "we are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars" (Chapter 3). The challenge lies in not losing sight of those stars in the face of the darkness around us.

2.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* stands as a powerful critique of Victorian society's superficiality, moral decay, and the dangers of unchecked desire. Through his exploration of corruption, aestheticism, and morality, Wilde exposes the darkness of an era obsessed with beauty and pleasure.

Chapter Two: Literary Analysis of the Superficial Nature in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Throughout the novel, Wilde portrays the character of Dorian Gray as a representation of the tensions between pleasure-seeking and declining morality in Victorian society. Dorian's relentless pursuit of physical appearance and his obsession with youth ultimately lead to his moral downfall, as depicted through his decaying portrait. The symbolism employed by Wilde serves as a visual representation of the consequences of his hedonistic lifestyle and the corruption of his soul.

Wilde also criticizes the aestheticism movement of the late 19th century, highlighting its conflict with traditional moral values. Dorian's rejection of societal norms and his indulgence in personal desires reflect the larger societal shift towards individualism and self-gratification. Through Dorian's narrative, Wilde reveals the dangers of a society that prioritizes surface-level beauty over deeper moral considerations.

The novel's conclusion, marked by Dorian's death, serves as a reflection of the moral decay prevalent in Victorian society. It underscores the consequences of a culture consumed by the pursuit of beauty and pleasure, showing the destructive impact it can have on individuals and society as a whole.

By examining the themes of physical appearance, the tension between aestheticism and morality, and the consequences of pleasure-seeking, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* offers a withering critique of Victorian values while also providing profound insights into the complexities of human nature. Wilde's masterful storytelling and profound social commentary continues to resonate, making the novel a timeless exploration of the human condition and a cautionary tale against the hazards of superficiality and unchecked desire.

Chapter Two: Literary Analysis of the Superficial Nature in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

General Conclusion

General Conclusion:

Victorian society was characterized by a pervasive superficiality that emphasized appearances over substance and placed a high value on societal norms and conventions rather than genuine individuality or personal growth. Oscar Wilde does an excellent job of depicting this in his novel "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*."

Oscar Wilde's novel, published in 1890, serves as a powerful critique of societal norms and values through its haunting portrayal of a man who succumbs to the allure of eternal youth, wealth, and physical beauty. The captivating portrait of Dorian Gray becomes a symbol of his hidden sins and moral decay, while he himself remains outwardly unblemished and seemingly untainted.

The research focused on Wilde's portrayal of superficiality, the role of aestheticism in perpetuating it, the influence of societal norms, the consequences of pursuing physical appearance, and the use of symbolism to highlight its destructive nature.

By dividing the dissertation into two chapters, a literature review and analysis chapter, the study laid the groundwork by defining the theory of new hedonism and the aesthetic movement as well as examining existing critical interpretations, and scholarly works related to the theme of superficiality in literature. The subsequent analysis chapter delves into a close reading of the novel, unravelling the layers of superficiality through the exploration of key characters and Wilde's masterful use of literary techniques.

Through this examination of superficiality in "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*," the dissertation aim was to contribute to the understanding of human nature, societal values, and the potential dangers of prioritizing external appearances. It revealed the complexities that lie beneath the surface and explores the timeless struggle between the allure of beauty and the pursuit of a meaningful and authentic existence.

In conclusion, this dissertation's goal was to unveil the enigma of superficiality within "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*" and provide valuable insights into the lasting relevance and impact of Wilde's masterpiece. By understanding the consequences of embracing superficiality, it shed light on the profound choices individuals face in navigating the complexities of human existence and the pursuit of a meaningful life.

WORKS CITED

Works Cited

Arnold, Matthew. *Culture and Anarchy*. Dover Publications, 1994.

Bateman, Thomas. "*The Ethics of Individualism*." *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2018, pp. 145-155.

Brannigan, John. "*Hedonism in Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray*." *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 22, no. 4, 1990, pp. 455-469.

Bristow, Joseph. *Oscar Wilde and Modern Culture: The Making of a Legend*. Ohio State University Press, 2009.

Burdett, Carolyn (15 March 2014). "*Aestheticism and decadence*". British Library. Archived from the original on 21 October 2020. Retrieved 19 January 2021.

Eliot, T. S. "*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*." Poetry Foundation, 1915

Ellmann, Richard. *Oscar Wilde*. 1st American ed. New York, Knopf, 1988.

Gargano, James W. "*The Picture of Dorian Gray: Wilde's Parable of the Fall*." *ELH*, vol. 36, no. 2, 1969, pp. 282-293

Gere, Charlotte. "*The Aesthetic Movement*." The Grove Dictionary of Art Online, edited by Jane Turner, Oxford University Press, 2003.

Halperin, David. "*The Corruption of Youth: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Compromise*." *Victorian Studies*, vol. 28, no. 2, 1985, pp. 247-269. JSTOR

Harrison, Charles, and Paul Wood. *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2003.

Helfer, Andrew J. "*Wilde, Oscar: The Picture of Dorian Gray*." The Literary Encyclopedia, 27 Jan. 2011

Lawler, Donald L., and Charles E. Knott. "*The Context of Invention: Suggested Origins of 'Dorian Gray'*." *PMLA*, vol. 92, no. 5, 1977, pp. 820-833.

Leavis, F.R. *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture*. Cambridge UP, 1930.

Lu, Yan. "*The Picture of Dorian Gray: The Tragedy of Beauty*." *Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2017, pp. 33-38.

Lucretius. *On the Nature of Things*. Translated by Martin Ferguson Smith, Hackett Publishing Company, 2001.

Mellown, Elissa. "*The Cultivation of the Self in Wilde's 'The Picture of Dorian Gray'*." *Victorian Newsletter*, no. 83, 1993, pp. 23-27.

Morris, William. "*The Beauty of Life*." *The Beauty of Life, and Other Essays*. The University Press, 1900, pp. 1-37.

- Onfray, Michel. *The Politics of Happiness: On New Hedonism*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.
- Pater, Walter. "Conclusion." *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, edited by Adam Phillips, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 187-206.
- Pearson, Hesketh. *Oscar Wilde: His Life and Wit*. HarperCollins, 1946.
- Prettejohn, Elizabeth. "Dante Gabriel Rossetti." *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 154, no. 1309, 2012, pp. 66-75.
- Riquelme, John Paul. "Between Two Worlds and beyond Them: John Ruskin and Walter Pater." *Oscar Wilde in Context*, edited by Kerry Powell and Peter Raby, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013, pp. 125–136. *Literature in Context*.
- Rosenblum, Robert. "The Aesthetic Movement." *Transformations in Late Eighteenth Century Art*, edited by Robert Rosenblum and H.W. Janson, Princeton University Press, 1967, pp. 273-294.
- Saeed, C. M., and A. P. D. A. H. Sharif. "The Aesthetic Use of Symbols in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*". *ALUSTATH JOURNAL FOR HUMAN AND SOCIAL SCIENCES*, vol. 61, no. 3, Sept. 2022.
- Smith, Nicole. "The Picture of Dorian Gray: Art, Ethics, and the Artist." *Literature Compass*, vol. 9, no. 11, 2012, pp. 769-777.
- Stayley, Thomas T., ed. *The Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Vol. 34. Michigan: Book Tower, 1985.

Stetz, Margaret. "*Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Aesthetic Movement.*" The Cambridge Companion to the Pre-Raphaelites, edited by Elizabeth Prettejohn, Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 86-101

Stetz, Margaret. "*Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetic Movement*". In The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Literary Culture (pp. 460-476). Oxford University Press.

Whistler, James McNeill. "*Ten O'Clock Lecture.*" 1885. The Gentle Art of Making Enemies. Edited by Sheridan Ford, Dover, 1967, pp. 99-100.

Wilde, Oscar. "*The Critic as Artist.*" The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, edited by Merlin Holland, vol. 4, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 109-192.

Wilde, Oscar. "*The Decay of Lying.*" The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, edited by Merlin Holland, HarperCollins, 2003.

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

Zehnalová, Jana. "*Art for Art's Sake in Wilde's 'The Picture of Dorian Gray'.*" Brno Studies in English, vol. 36, no. 2, 2010, pp. 77-88.

Summary

This study examines the theme of superficiality in Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and its critique of Victorian societal norms. The researcher analyzes Wilde's portrayal of superficiality and its effects on society using an analytical approach. The findings contribute to a better understanding of Wilde's criticism of shallow values and the societal consequences of prioritizing appearances. The research begins by providing an overview of Wilde's life, his novel, and relevant literary theories on superficiality. It then offers a close reading of the novel, focusing on Dorian Gray's characterization and the influence he experiences. Overall, this research underscores the ongoing relevance of Wilde's work and prompts critical reflection on the impact of superficiality.

Resumé

Cette étude examine le thème de la superficialité dans le roman d'Oscar Wilde, *Le Portrait de Dorian Gray*, ainsi que sa critique des normes sociales victoriennes. Le chercheur analyse la représentation de la superficialité par Wilde et ses effets sur la société en utilisant une approche analytique. Les résultats contribuent à une meilleure compréhension de la critique de Wilde envers les valeurs superficielles et des conséquences sociales de la priorité accordée aux apparences. La recherche commence par fournir un aperçu de la vie de Wilde, de son roman et des théories littéraires pertinentes sur la superficialité. Elle propose ensuite une lecture approfondie du roman, en se concentrant sur la caractérisation de Dorian Gray et l'influence qu'il subit. Dans l'ensemble, cette recherche souligne la pertinence continue de l'œuvre de Wilde et suscite une réflexion critique sur l'impact de la superficialité.

ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف موضوع السطحية وتأثيراتها، وانتقادها الكامن للقيم المجتمعية الفيكتورية. لشرح ذلك، ركزنا على رواية أوسكار وايلد "صورة دوريان جراي" وتفاعلات الشخصيات لكشف عواقب العيش السطحي. ولتحقيق هدف هذا العمل، استخدم الباحث منهجًا تحليليًا لتصوير أوسكار وايلد للسطحية وكيف أثرت على المجتمع الفيكتوري. وبالتالي، تسهم نتائج هذه الدراسة في فهم أعمق لانتقاد وايلد للقيم الخفيفة وتبعات المجتمعية لتفضيل المظاهر. سيبدأ البحث بنظرة عامة حول حياة أوسكار وايلد وروايته والنظريات ذات الصلة بموضوع السطحية في الأدب. ثم سيقدم قراءة دقيقة للرواية، مسلطًا الضوء على تصوير دوريان جراي وتأثير التأثير عليه. وبالتالي، يسلط هذا البحث الضوء على أهمية عمل وايلد المستمرة ويدعو إلى تفكير نقدي في تأثير السطحية.