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Split Selves and Mortal Fears: Terror Management Analysis of Aging, Anxiety, and the Body in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*



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Abstract

*Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* offers a powerful critique of society's obsession with youth, beauty, and the denial of aging. This article examines Dorian Gray's psychological disintegration through the lens of Terror Management Theory (TMT), focusing on age-related anxiety, fear of mortality, and the fragmentation of identity. Employing qualitative close textual analysis, the study explores how Dorian's fixation on eternal youth functions as a terror-management strategy aimed at suppressing death awareness and preserving symbolic immortality. The analysis introduces the concept of split aging—the separation of biological, moral, and psychological aging as central to Dorian's character, manifested through the division between his youthful body and the decaying portrait. By integrating TMT with literary analysis, the article demonstrates how fear of death, animality, and insignificance drives Dorian's rejection of aging and moral responsibility. Ultimately, the study argues that Dorian's denial of human limitations leads not to transcendence but to psychological fragmentation and self-destruction. This interdisciplinary approach offers a novel interpretation of Wilde's novel by situating ageism and mortality anxiety at the core of Dorian Gray's tragic downfall.*

Introduction

The concept of ageism was introduced by Robert Butler in the 1960s (Butler, 1969) to describe a widespread form of bias similar to racism and sexism. In his later work (Butler, 1980), he outlined three interrelated aspects of ageism: biased attitudes, discriminatory actions, and institutional practices that systematically disadvantage older individuals. Extensive research conducted over the years has verified that ageism poses a serious threat to health and well-being, adversely affecting cognitive abilities, physical health, and mental health, while favorable self-perceptions regarding aging can enhance longevity (Levy et al., 2002; Hopf et al., 2021; Ye et al., 2020). However, ageist stereotypes often do not capture the highly individualized and intricate nature of the aging experience, which is shaped by a combination of biological, personal, and societal elements (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Melzer et al., 2020). Importantly, these stereotypes are not just imposed by society but are also

internalized by older individuals themselves, shaping their self-image and their views of other older people (Dionigi, 2015; Levy, 2009).

Background of the Study

Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890/1891) occupies a significant place in Victorian literature because of its provocative exploration of aesthetics, youth, morality, and the psychological effects related to narcissism. Initially released in Lippincott's Monthly Magazine in 1890 and later modified and published in book form in 1891, the novel swiftly became a center of moral, philosophical, and aesthetic discussions. Critics during the Victorian period, such as Charles Whibley (1890) and H. C. Sturgis (1891), criticized the book for its "unwholesome" themes and "degradation of moral sensibility," claiming it undermined the rigid moral values of its time (Schmid 2013; Guy 2007). These early criticisms emphasize how Wilde's story challenged Victorian society, which was heavily reliant on strict moral codes, idealized self-images, and deep-rooted anxieties about age, appearance, and reputation.

The backdrop of the novel is notably shaped by the Aesthetic Movement, which promoted the idea of "art for art's sake" (Morley 2014). As one of its most prominent advocates, Wilde used the story of Dorian Gray to examine the dangerous extremes of aestheticism when divorced from ethical considerations. Scholars such as Ellmann (1987) argue that Wilde's perspective is more nuanced than simple hedonism; he employed the narrative to depict the psychological ruin stemming from valuing beauty as the sole measure of human worth.

Theoretically, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* also interacts with the Gothic literary genre, integrating aspects of duality, and hidden corruption, and the supernatural portrait that ages (Botting 2014). Researchers like Punter and Byron (2004) classify the novel as a modern Gothic text due to its emphasis on horror arising not from external monsters but from internal psychological decay. The Faustian theme (Doctor Faustus by Christopher Morlove), where Dorian metaphorically trades his soul for eternal youth, positions the novel within a historical lineage of moral stories that explore the limits of human desire (Halberstam 1995).

Recent literary criticism views the text as a significant critique of ageism, addressing societal anxieties about aging and the cultural fixation on youth (Harrington 2021;

Calasanti 2020). Dorian's fear of aging, combined with his desire to preserve everlasting beauty, reflects contemporary sociological interpretations of ageism that regard aging as a threat to identity, social value, and desirability.

Therefore, the context of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* weaves together Victorian morality, aesthetic theory, Gothic influences, and societal apprehensions about youth and aging. The controversies surrounding its publication, along with comprehensive critical analysis, highlight why the novel remains significant in contemporary discussions about ageism. It not only challenges Victorian perceptions of beauty, but it also foreshadows present-day cultural pressures related to appearance, aging, and the associated fears regarding both moral and physical deterioration. For this reason, the novel provides a profound textual foundation for investigating how beauty functions as a form of capital and how the denial of aging can result in emotional, psychological, and ethical collapse.

Oscar Wilde was a renowned Irish poet, author, playwright, and poet celebrated for his sharp wit and exceptional use of language. He was born in Dublin on November 6, 1854. His writing is well-known for its humor, irony, and critique of Victorian morals. Wilde's novel "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*" is a significant work that delves into the themes of beauty, youth, and ethics. Wilde's clever dialogue and epigrams make his writings both engaging and thought-provoking. He also faced numerous tragedies in his life, including imprisonment and accusations of homosexuality. Oscar Wilde's works have inspired readers worldwide, establishing him as one of the most iconic figures in English literature.

The story of Dorian Gray revolves around a young and handsome man named Dorian Gray, who fears the process of aging. He becomes influenced by Lord Henry's philosophies regarding pleasure and beauty, leading him to sell his soul to the devil, resulting in the portrait aging instead of him. Dorian indulges in a life of selfishness and sin while maintaining his youthful and flawless appearance. Each time he engages in a crime or immoral act, the portrait subtly becomes more grotesque. Ultimately, when Dorian attempts to destroy the portrait, he inadvertently ends up destroying himself. The portrait returns to its original beauty, while Dorian meets his end, aged and disfigured.

Problem Statement

Despite extensive scholarship on Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, little attention has been given to the psychological impact of ageism on Dorian Gray and the role of mortality anxiety in his moral and psychological decline. The problem lies in understanding how societal and personal fears of aging, as well as the desire to escape death, shape Dorian's decisions, behaviors, and ultimate downfall. Specifically, there is a need to examine how Dorian's experience of aging biological, moral, and psychological is intertwined with his fear of death and existential anxieties, as conceptualized through Terror Management Theory (TMT). Without this analysis, the connection between age-related fear, moral corruption, and the consequences of denying human limitations remains underexplored in Wildean studies.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are as follows:

- To explore how Oscar Wilde portrays the anxiety associated with aging through the character of Dorian Gray.
- To evaluate the concept of split aging as seen in the character of Dorian, including its moral, biological, and psychological impacts.
- To examine the Terror Management theory (TMT) the psychological threats the fear of death (inescapable mortality), the fear of animality (the decline of the physical body), and the fear of insignificance (the challenge of maintaining self-esteem in later life).

Research Questions

The primary research questions include;

- How does Wilde criticize the society's worship of youth and beauty through the Dorian Gray ?
- How does split ageing affect Dorian gray life in terms of biological, moral and psychological ageing?
- How do younger individuals view and express perspectives on aging, and amplify TMT threats of death, animalistic traits, and insignificance associated with aging?

Rationale of the Study

This researcher selected this topic because these issues are prevalent in society, where many men often feel anxious as they confront aging and the passage of time. This

matter deserves attention since it is a universal experience that everyone will eventually encounter. The aim of this study is to investigate how Oscar Wilde illustrates the fears related to aging through the character of Dorian Gray, along with the effects of TMT on individuals' lives. Further research will be conducted on this topic.

Limitation of Study

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The study based on a qualitative and interpretative approach, which means the findings rely heavily on textual interpretation. Different readers and scholars may interpret Oscar Wilde theme of ageism because this topic is very vast. But this study is limited on the Temporal ageism and Terror management theory (TMT), including it's three corresponding threats. The research prioritizes theoretical interpretation over empirical fieldwork.

Significance of Study

The primary importance of this research is that it allows readers to critically assess the representation and psychological processing of aging, mortality, and the fear of death through the character of Dorian Gray. This study emphasizes the idea of split aging, where the physical body remains perpetually youthful while the hidden self, depicted by the portrait, experiences the inevitable and moral deterioration that Dorian seeks to avoid. Through this examination, the researcher will gain insight into how the illusion of eternal youth becomes a harmful obsession. Moreover, this research illustrates the societal perception of how value is placed on appearances versus reality. People often sacrifice their own lives and the lives of others for the sake of appearances. In fact, many individuals continue to confront this specific issue in their daily lives.

Literature Review

Critical responses to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* have explored the novel through aesthetic, moral, psychological, and philosophical frameworks, emphasizing Oscar Wilde's complex engagement with beauty, identity, and ethics. Akudolu et al. (2024) argue that Wilde's aestheticism is inseparable from moral responsibility, presenting him as an "ethical hedonist" who celebrates pleasure while acknowledging ethical restraint. This interpretation challenges purely amoral readings of the novel and situates Dorian Gray's pursuit of eternal youth within a moral and psychological struggle. Similarly, Hossain (2023) contends that Wilde's aesthetic cynicism reflects

humanistic liberalism rather than nihilism, revealing the tension between surface beauty and inner corruption that defines Dorian's character.

Psychological readings of the novel further illuminate this tension. Lian and Zhong (2021), drawing on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, interpret Dorian as the embodiment of Wilde's desire for admiration, recognition, and self-esteem. Their analysis highlights the fragmentation of identity within the novel, anticipating Dorian's eventual psychological division. This split is most powerfully represented through the portrait, which Al-Jabbari and Jarab (2014) identify as a living entity that absorbs Dorian's moral decay and physical aging. By separating Dorian's youthful body from the consequences of time and sin, the portrait creates a divided self and enables the denial of bodily deterioration.

The fear of aging and bodily decline that motivates this division can be contextualized through studies of ageism and cultural anxiety. Weir (2023) identifies ageism as one of the last socially acceptable prejudices, noting its harmful psychological effects and its role in reinforcing fear of aging. Featherstone and Hepworth's (1991) concept of the "mask of aging" further explains how youthful appearances function as a façade concealing inner deterioration, while Gullette (2004) argues that cultural narratives of aging as decline intensify self-alienation and fear. These perspectives illuminate Dorian's obsession with youth as a response to the cultural devaluation of aging and the body.

From a psychological standpoint, ageism has been directly linked to mortality anxiety. O'Connor and McFadden (2012), using Terror Management Theory (TMT), argue that aging and illness serve as reminders of death, provoking defensive attitudes and behaviors. Greenberg, Vail, and Pyszczynski (2014) explain that awareness of mortality generates existential terror, which individuals manage by clinging to cultural worldviews and self-esteem that promise symbolic immortality. Ayars, Lifshin, and Greenberg (n.d.) further emphasize that these terror-management mechanisms shape human behavior at both conscious and unconscious levels.

Empirical extensions of TMT reinforce its relevance beyond psychology. Arendsen et al. (2025) demonstrate that mortality salience encourages compensatory behaviors aimed at preserving meaning, identity, and self-worth. These findings resonate with Becker's (1973) concept of "immortality projects," in which individuals

seek symbolic transcendence through achievements, beauty, or social validation. Dorian Gray's obsessive preservation of youth can thus be understood as an immortality project designed to deny death through aesthetic permanence. Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski (1991) similarly argue that self-esteem functions as a buffer against death anxiety, a mechanism that collapses once symbolic defenses fail. Gothic criticism further supports this reading. Punter (1996) and Rank (1971) identify the double as a recurring Gothic device through which death anxiety and repressed fear are externalized. In Wilde's novel, the portrait functions as a Gothic double that contains Dorian's guilt, aging, and mortality, allowing him to sustain an illusion of immortality. Bauman (1992) and Twigg (2004) situate this obsession within modern culture, where youth and the body replace spiritual immortality as strategies for transcending death.

Although scholars have examined *The Picture of Dorian Gray* through aestheticism, cynicism, psychological desire, ageism, Gothic doubling, and Terror Management Theory, these approaches have largely remained separate. No study has systematically integrated Terror Management Theory with age-related mortality anxiety to analyze Dorian Gray's split identity and fear of bodily decay. This article addresses that gap by interpreting Dorian's fixation on youth, rejection of aging, and reliance on the portrait as terror-management strategies, revealing how temporary ageism and death anxiety drive his psychological disintegration.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach grounded in close textual analysis to examine Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* through the psychological framework of Terror Management Theory (TMT) and age-related mortality anxiety. Qualitative textual analysis is particularly suited to this investigation as it enables a nuanced interpretation of literary representations of moral decay, divided identity, and the denial of aging within their cultural and philosophical context. Drawing on foundational concepts of TMT articulated by Greenberg et al. (1986), the analysis focuses on how fear of death, anxiety over bodily decline, and the pursuit of symbolic immortality shape Dorian Gray's thoughts, behaviors, and ethical deterioration throughout the novel.

The primary source for this study is Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, with specific

attention given to narrative moments that foreground youth, beauty, narcissism, hedonism, and the fear of aging. A close reading of these passages allows for an exploration of how Dorian's preserved appearance and the deteriorating portrait function as psychological defenses against mortality awareness. To contextualize and strengthen the analysis, the study also engages with secondary scholarly sources drawn from aesthetic criticism, psychoanalytic theory, New Historicism, and cultural studies. These perspectives support a richer understanding of Wilde's engagement with Victorian ideology while maintaining Terror Management Theory as the central analytical lens. By integrating close textual analysis with interdisciplinary critical insights, this article offers an original interpretation of Dorian Gray's character as a literary embodiment of terror management processes driven by ageism and death anxiety.

Analysis

Oscar Wilde's *"The Picture of Dorian Gray"* intricately examines humanity's fixation on youth and the anxiety surrounding aging. The novel mirrors Victorian society's conviction that physical beauty and youth hold significant value, while old age is something to be feared or avoided. Through Dorian Gray's journey, Wilde portrays a vivid depiction of shallow individuals in society who are obsessed with youth, aging, and beauty, reflecting Dorian's own preoccupation with his looks and the passage of time. Wilde illustrates society's perceptions of people in various ways throughout the narrative.

Wilde depicts the concept of split aging in the character of Dorian Gray throughout the book. Split aging is notably tied to Dorian's character through multiple dimensions, such as biological, moral, and psychological aging. Biological aging pertains to Dorian's desire to remain youthful; he wishes for his body to stay young while his portrait ages, having sold his soul for this wish. His desires are met, and he manages to escape the biological fear of death. However, while he preserves his physical form, he remains unaware that his portrait ages with each passing day. Conversely, Dorian Gray's character experiences a steady moral degradation. Although his outward beauty stays intact, he gradually becomes morally corrupt, with each of his sins reflected in the portrait. The third significant aspect of split aging is psychological aging, which relates to Dorian Gray's inner mental and emotional

decline. Despite his unchanging physical appearance, his mind and emotions deteriorate, becoming troubled and damaged over time. All three aspects are consistently present in Dorian Gray's character.

Another crucial theme in *"The Picture of Dorian Gray"* is Terror Management Theory (TMT). TMT delves into how anxiety surrounding mortality, animality, and feelings of insignificance can influence human behavior. The notion of aging terrifies Dorian, as it serves as a reminder of his mortality. This fear propels his yearning for eternal youth; by retaining his physical youth, Dorian believes he can evade death and the relentless passage of time. Thus, his fear of death drives his pursuit to escape biological aging. In TMT, animality signifies the dread of being reduced to a mere physical, instinct-driven being subject to decay and death. Dorian convinces himself of his immortality, and his obsession with beauty and perfection is an attempt to transcend his primal nature. He indulges in various vices, such as cruelty and hedonism, which gradually erode his humanity. Another significant psychological aspect is the fear of insignificance. Dorian is profoundly afraid of becoming ordinary, forgotten, or meaningless. His youth and beauty provide him with social relevance and admiration, and losing them would equate to losing his worth, compelling him to maintain his appearance at any cost, even if it results in moral degradation. Collectively, these concerns elucidate Dorian's internal struggle and moral decline, illustrating how the refusal to accept human limitations ultimately leads to his destruction.

4.1 Aging Anxiety and Fear of Growing Old

Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* depicts Dorian as a character whose life is heavily influenced by anxiety surrounding aging and the fear of growing old. These apprehensions shape his aspirations, choices, and ultimate downfall.

4.1.1: Aging Anxiety

Aging anxiety refers to the psychological dread of losing youth, beauty, and social worth as time progresses. In the character of Dorian Gray, this anxiety is ignited by Lord Henry. In the very second chapter, Lord Henry states that,

“you have the most marvelous youth, and youth is the one thing worth having.”

“I don't feel that, lord Henry.”

“No, you don't feel it now. Someday, when you are old and wrinkled and ugly, when

thought has seared your forehead with its lines and passion branded your lips with its hideous fires, you will feel it, you will feel it terribly.”(Chp:2)

This statement reveals Henry’s own fear of aging, which he instills in Dorian. These words show how Henry consistently emphasizes that youth is life’s greatest asset. In this discussion, Wilde illustrates that Dorian was initially unaware of this concept; however, upon becoming painfully cognizant that beauty is transient, this revelation ignites profound anxiety within him. He starts to relate aging to loss, decay, and becoming irrelevant. When Dorian gazes upon the portrait, this fear reaches its zenith. At that moment, he remarks,

“How sad it is! I shall grow old, and horrible, and dreadful. But this picture will remain always young.”(Chp:2)

which indicates his extreme fear of aging. His words, expressions, and thoughts all reflect his anxiety towards getting older. He expresses elsewhere that,

“I am jealous of everything whose beauty does not die. I am jealous of the portrait you have painted of me.” (Chp:2)

This also illustrates how the fear of aging shifted Dorian’s perspective and contributed to his gradual transformation. He evolved from a decent character into a morally corrupt one.

This anxiety drives him to make a desperate wish that the portrait would grow older instead of him. He stated,

“If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that—for that—I would give everything! Yes, there is nothing in the whole world I would not give! I would give my soul for that!” (Chap: 2).

His fear of death led him down a perilous path, where he ultimately surrendered his soul to the devil (similar to Doctor Faustus). This illustrates how individuals perceive aging and how the anxiety surrounding age can lead to their ruin and downfall.

4.1.2: Fear of Growing Old

The fear of growing old in Dorian’s character transcends mere physical changes; it symbolizes his dread of becoming insignificant and forgotten. Aging would signify a loss of admiration, power, and identity in a society that prioritizes youth above all else. Within the novel, when Henry piques Dorian’s obsession with beauty and youth, Dorian exclaims, “Henry Wotton is perfectly right. Youth is the only thing worth

having. When I find that I am growing old, I shall kill myself." (Chp:2)

These words illustrate his fear of aging. Wilde portrays societal attitudes through Dorian Gray's character. Another character, Lord Henry, also comments on society's fear of aging. Elsewhere, Lord Henry remarks,

"There was so much in you that charmed me that I felt I must tell you something about yourself. I thought how tragic it would be if you were wasted. For there is such a little time that your youth will last— such a little time. The common hill- flowers wither, but they blossom again. The laburnum will be as yellow next June as it is now. In a month there will be purple stars on the clematis, and year after year the green night of its leaves will hold its purple stars. But we never get back our youth." (Chp:2)

Here, Wilde explores Victorian society's obsession, illustrating how people in the 18th century are preoccupied with youth, beauty, and the anxiety surrounding aging. They experience fear and anxiety about getting older, much like Dorian Gray, the main character of the novel.

4.2: Split Aging: The Physical Body and the Portrait

The concept of split aging is crucial to the novel's ethical and psychological significance. Split aging denotes the unnatural disconnection between Dorian Gray's physical form and his inner self or soul, which is symbolized by the painting. After Dorian expresses a desire (the Faustian wish) to remain eternally youthful, the normal aging process is disrupted; his body stays young while the portrait ages and deteriorates in his stead. Simultaneously, his moral and psychological state transforms his mortality into immortality. Wilde investigates the notion of split aging and its dimensions through the character of Dorian.

4.2.1: Biological Youth and the Visible Immorality

Dorian Gray exemplifies biological youth and overt immorality through the juxtaposition of his corporeal form and his portrait. Biologically, Dorian Gray remains perpetually young; his face shows no indications of aging, illness, or physical decline. This change occurs as a result of his fateful wish, causing Dorian's body to become detached from the natural process of aging. His physical appearance stays eternally youthful and attractive, regardless of the passage of time or the sins he commits. Upon returning from the incident with Sibyl Vane and rejecting her, Dorian was astonished when he saw the portrait painted by Basil Hallward. There was a line that mentioned:

“The face appeared to him to be a little changed. The expression looked different. One would have said that there was a touch of cruelty in the mouth. It was certainly strange”(Chap:7)

and another that stated: “But the strange expression that he had noticed in the face of the portrait seemed to linger there,to be more intensified even....he had done some dreadful things”(Chap:7)

These lines illustrate the extreme concept of biological aging. Through these lines, Wilde delves into the biological aspect; despite Dorian's sins, his face reveals nothing dreadful. However, his evident immorality does not manifest in his body but in the portrait. The painting openly reflects the moral decay that Dorian conceals behind his youthful facade. Each sinful action distorts and uglifies the portrait, making his immorality visibly apparent. In this manner, Wilde illustrates that while biological youth can mask decay, moral corruption inevitably seeks expression. The contrast highlights the peril of prioritizing physical youth over moral accountability.

4.2.2: Moral and Psychological Impact of Split Aging on Dorian Gray

The moral and psychological consequences of split aging are significant aspects reflected in Dorian's character. While his physical appearance remains youthful and unaffected by time, in the final chapters, we see Dorian after 18 years, still looking like a charming young man. This illustrates his biological youth; although he is still young, handsome, and attractive even after nearly two decades, his moral compass steadily deteriorates. Over time, his understanding of right and wrong diminishes, leading him to become more ruthless, egotistical, and apathetic toward the suffering of others. This is particularly evident in chapter 9 when Basil Hallward confronts Dorian about Sibyl Vane and her death. In this moment, Dorian exhibits complete coldness and indifference in his demeanor. He responds with, “Stop, Basil! I won't hear it!” Cried Dorian, leaping to his feet. “ You must not tell me about things. What is done is done. What is past is past!”

“You call yesterday the past?”(Chp:9)

These words highlight Dorian's emotional detachment. It is in this chapter that he begins his moral decline. Basil Hallward articulates his shock with the words, “Dorian, this is horrible! Something has changed you completely. You look exactly the same wonderful boy who, day after day, used to come down to my studio to sit for his

picture. But you were simple, natural, and affection then. _____ You talk as if you had no heart no pity in you.” (chp:9). This statement illustrates how much Dorian has transformed. He has turned cruel and self-centered, having lost all remnants of goodness and a kind heart; he is now solely focused on himself. Consequently, he refers to Sibyl Vane's death as a “vulgar accident.” He states, “My dear Basil! Surely you don't think it was a vulgar accident? Of course she killed herself.”(Chp:9)

This line exemplifies his cruelty, emotional detachment, and moral degradation, showcasing the gradual erosion of ethical values resulting from the disconnection between appearance and accountability.

One key aspect of split aging is the psychological effect on Dorian's character. Psychologically, the portrait serves as a continual source of dread and internal struggle. It embodies everything Dorian attempts to conceal from both the world and himself. As the portrait becomes increasingly grotesque, Dorian finds himself tormented by guilt, anxiety, and paranoia. His psychological aging begins in chapters 7-8, after Sibyl Vane's death. Following her death, he initially experiences a sense of remorse. In chapter 7, he reflects on his feelings for Sibyl, acknowledging that everything occurs because of him (Dorian). He expresses,

“She was everything to me.” I said I would go back to her. I felt I had done wrong. And now she is dead.”(Chp:8)

These words indicate Dorian's regret, yet he quickly pushes these emotions aside. In the subsequent chapter (8), he exhibits complete indifference, referring to Sibyl Vane's death as a “vulgar accident.” He states, “My dear Basil—” (Chp:8)

This dialogue reveals his emotional detachment and marks the first clear indication of his mental and psychological deterioration. Chapter 13 acts as a pivotal moment in Dorian's psychological decay, as he murders his friend Basil Hallward. Here, Dorian's psychological aging reaches its peak, as he initially feels no remorse or guilt for the act. Wilde illustrates Dorian's irresponsibility through these words. In chapter 14, Wilde describes Dorian's behavior in a matter-of-fact manner, highlighting Dorian's careless actions.

He states, “Dorian was sleeping quite peacefully, lying on his right side, with one hand underneath his cheek. He looked like a boy who had been tired out with play, or study.” (Chp: 14)

These lines illustrate Dorian's psychological aging, as he behaves foolishly or irresponsibly, akin to a child.

In chapters 15-19, Dorian lives in constant anxiety, fearful of James Vane and the possibility of being exposed. In chapter 16, when James confronts Dorian, their discussion revolves around Sibyl Vane's death.

James declares, "I swore I would kill you in return. I had no---- You had better confess your sin, for as sure as I am James vane, you are going to die." (Chp:16)

At this moment, Dorian feels fear, but he narrowly escapes danger due to his physical attractiveness (biological aging). Dorian remarks to James, "How long ago is it since your sister died?---", "Eighteen years! Set me under the lamp and look at my face!" (chp: 16)

He salvages his life through the deception that he is still a young man, suggesting they could not harm his sister. Nevertheless, his fear lingers until chapter 19. He feels apprehensive about every minor conversation regarding sins, as they remind him of Sibyl Vane, Basil Hallward, and the dreadful state of his portrait. At one point, He states,

"And yet if had been merely an illusion, how—Each hideous detail came back to him with added horror. Out of the black cave of time, terrible and swathed in scarlet, rose the image of his sin" (Chp:18).

In chapter 18, Dorian expresses profound guilt during a conversation with Lord Henry. When Henry discusses life, Dorian wishes aloud, "I wish I could love—" (chp: 18).

These lines emphasize Dorian's intense guilt. Wilde demonstrates that when individuals become overly self-absorbed and prioritize themselves above all else, they tend to encounter solitude. These lines clearly depict Dorian's loneliness, revealing how his very personality weighs heavily upon him.

Overall, throughout chapters 7-18, we witness various aspects of Dorian's psychological aging. He feels a persistent sense of fear and guilt in these chapters, yet his character remains fragmented. As mentioned, at times he is aware of his physical form (biological aging) while at other moments, he grapples with the shame of his transgressions. We observe a continual transformation in his character; at the beginning of the novel, he embodies happiness as per Henry's perspective and

possesses beauty and youth. However, by the later chapters, he experiences guilt stemming from his psychological aging. This is why when the Duchess discusses happiness, Dorian responds in a particular manner, stating,

“I have never searched for happiness. Who wants happiness? I have searched for pleasure.” (Chp: 17)

This line illustrates the transformation of his character, which is fragmented; at the novel's start, he was consumed by self-interest and desired societal validation, but by chapter 20, he has dramatically changed.

Wilde portrays his character in these lines. “As he strolled home, smoking his cigarette, two young men in evening dress passed him. He heard one of them whisper to the other, “That is Dorian gray.”—He was tired of hearing his own name now.” Chapter 20.

These lines also reflect his psychological aging, which continuously shifts, facing fear, guilt, and regression. All of these chapters illustrate how the denial of aging leads to a psychological breakdown.

4.3: Terror Management Theory (TMT) and Aging Anxiety

According to TMT, people fear getting older because it serves as a reminder of death, the loss of control, and feelings of insignificance. Dorian Gray's fixation on remaining youthful clearly illustrates this anxiety regarding aging. To avoid aging, he engages in reckless behavior, even going so far as to sell his soul, which ultimately leads to his downfall and destruction. In TMT, three psychological concepts are crucial, and these are distinctly represented through the characters in Dorian Gray. They include the fear of death, animality, and feelings of insignificance.

4.3.1: Fear of Death

In Dorian Gray's character, the aspect of Fear of Death is fundamental. Dorian experiences a fear of death because aging serves as a reminder that life is finite. In an effort to escape this fear, he trades his soul to the devil and makes a wish, which underscores his intense fear of death. His rejection of aging is essentially a rejection of death itself. At the novel's outset, Dorian is consumed by thoughts of youth, a sentiment he expresses when he says,

“If it were only the other way! If the picture could change, and I could be always what I am now.” (Chp:2)

This statement reveals both his obsession with youth and his dread of aging and death. Additionally, he sold his soul to the devil, which protected him from this terror (fear of death). Until the novel's conclusion (Chp:19), he continues to be haunted by the fear of death.

He states, "I have not the slightest idea. If Basil chooses to hide himself, it is no business of mine. If he is dead, I don't want to think about him. Death is the only thing that ever terrifies me. I hate it."(Chp: 19)

These quotations indicate his fear of death from chapter 2 to 19. Dorian's character aligns closely with TMT theory, as he is determined to avoid death, to the extent that he sold his soul to the devil, much like Doctor Faustus.

4.3.2: Fear of Animality

Fear of animality refers to the anxiety that comes with aging, which weakens the body and diminishes beauty. It serves as a reminder that humans are physical beings, similar to animals. This concept is a key aspect of TMT theory and is closely tied to the character of Dorian. Dorian experiences this loss of beauty and control, leading him to wish, "I will never grow old." He is filled with horror and dread at the thought of aging. He wants to avoid wrinkles, unattractiveness, and feeling worthless.

He stated, "Youth is the only thing worth having. When I find that I am growing old, I shall kill myself."(Chp:2)

This quote reveals his fear of animality; he rejects the inevitability of aging. Furthermore, he claimed, "if I am growing old, I shall kill myself." His intense fear of old age is what he believes will render him ugly and useless. While he manages to protect his physical appearance from the effects of animality, his inner self deteriorates, as showcased in the portrait. He becomes morally depraved. He commits numerous sins, such as showing no remorse over Sibyl Vane's death, dismissing it as a mere accident, and later murdering his close friend Basil Hallward. He even felt joy upon hearing of James Vane's demise. Ultimately, he becomes morally bankrupt. Although he fears animality and takes measures to avoid it, his inner being becomes wholly animalistic.

4.3.3: Fear of Insignificance

Fear of insignificance represents another crucial element of TMT. This fear entails the concern that one may cease to receive attention or importance. Dorian Gray

experiences fears surrounding insignificance since he believes that aging will render him invisible and powerless. Dorian thinks that if he grows old, he will lose his worth, as society places a premium on beauty. Consequently, he sells his soul to the devil to remain youthful. This fear of insignificance transforms Dorian into a beast devoid of emotions. He never considers the pain Sibyl Vane's mother must have felt after her daughter's death. Additionally, he killed his friend Basil Hallward, and when confronted with Basil's corpse, he incinerated it (just as Alan incinerated Basil Hallward using chemicals such as nitric acid). The fear of insignificance entirely corrupts his character. Oscar Wilde illustrates this corruption in Chapter 13, referring to him simply as "young man" instead of using his name, which highlights Dorian's obsession with youth, beauty, and worth.

4.4: Tragic Outcome of Age Denial (Failure of Dorian Gray Age)

Though Dorian delayed aging by giving his soul to the devil, he never found happiness in his life. In the early days of his existence, when he made this wish, he aimed to escape old age. While he succeeded in evading aging, he also lost his sense of morality. His inner self became completely corrupt due to his refusal to accept the passage of time. Throughout the novel, he felt no remorse for his wrongdoings or for his moral decay. Although he escaped the effects of age, this ultimately led to his downfall.

In the novel, he consistently avoids any change within himself. Up until chapter 18, he never contemplated morality or self-improvement. In chapter 19, he begins to consider changing himself, stating to Lord Henry,

“No, Harry, I have done too many dreadful things in my life. I am not going to do any more. I began my good actions yesterday.”(Chp:19).

At another moment, he declares,

“For I have a new ideal, Harry. I am going to alter. I think I have altered. (Chp:19)

He realizes that his refusal to acknowledge aging has resulted in his decline, prompting thoughts of change; however, it is too late. His desire to destroy the portrait culminates in his suicide.

“When they entered, they found hanging upon the wall a splendid portrait of their master as they had last seen him, in all the wonder of his exquisite youth and beauty. Lying on the floor was a dead man, in evening dress, with a knife in his heart. He was

withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage. It was not till they had examined the rings that they recognized who it was."(Chp:20).

These lines illustrate the tragic manner of his demise. The portrait, a symbol of destruction, has horrifically transformed, reverting to its original form, while Dorian's true condition is revealed. His obsession with denying age led to his ruin. Thus, he did not achieve freedom through his denial of aging; instead, he faced destruction.

Wilde conveyed a message to society that "no man can remain young." The scene of Dorian's death is extremely tragic, emphasizing that no one can escape the aging process. Ultimately, a person who denies aging will confront destruction rather than happiness.

Conclusion

To sum up all, Wilde's "*The Picture of Dorian Gray*" offers a compelling critique of humanity's obsession with youth and the rejection of aging, highlighting the psychological, moral, and existential repercussions of such denial. Through the character of Dorian Gray, Wilde explores broader notions related to aging anxiety that are intertwined with the fear of death, animality, and feelings of insignificance. These anxieties gradually warp Dorian's identity. His intense desire to maintain his youth reflects the Victorian society's preoccupation with beauty, suggesting that in the 18th century, societal values were largely based on appearances as the measure of a person's worth. Dorian's dread of aging serves as a symbol of a wider human resistance to accepting mortality and limitations.

The idea of split aging acts as the novel's core metaphor, illustrating the perils of disconnecting physical appearance from moral and psychological responsibility. While Dorian's body remains youthful, his portrait takes on the toll of his actions, documenting his moral decay and psychological decline. This unnatural separation allows Dorian to avoid visible repercussions, yet ultimately fractures his identity, heightens his guilt, and hastens his mental deterioration. Wilde implies that possessing biological youth without accompanying moral development leads to spiritual vacuity instead of fulfillment.

When examined through the lens of Terror Management Theory (TMT), dire consequences result. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian Gray epitomizes these themes. Three primary psychological concepts are integral to this theory:

The first concept is the fear of death, exemplified in Dorian's character, who is willing to sacrifice his soul out of this fear.

The second concept is the fear of animalistic instincts, which reveals Dorian Gray's brutality. He becomes progressively cruel and detached as he strives to avoid confronting the reality of aging.

The third concept is the fear of insignificance, which underscores how Dorian sidesteps the implications of aging through feelings of impotence and lack of value in society. Through TMT, Wilde conveys a profound message that avoiding the aging process leads to these various issues.

Ultimately, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* serves as a timeless cautionary tale that the denial of aging and human limitations brings not external youth or meaning but psychological disintegration and moral failure. Wilde imparts a moral lesson to society that evading aging ultimately results in human decline and dreadful ramifications. This suggests that literature provides not only enjoyment and insight but also offers a moral and psychological perspective. Wilde's novel transcends being merely a moral fable; it is an in-depth psychological examination. Like Dorian, the character suffers as a consequence of his immortality. His beauty remains intact until the end, but his portrait quietly reveals the dangerous actions he took throughout his life, which he denied in his pursuit of a devilish wish. By the conclusion of the novel, the portrait invisibly narrates all his inner turmoil, signaling that this is not merely a future steeped in anxiety but a powerful force driving humanity towards their own downfall.

This analysis has concentrated on extreme individual scenarios illustrated by supernatural narratives like Dorian's tale. It does not consider that the societal experiences of ageism are not exclusive to ordinary individuals. The researcher also suggests investigating this theory in other contexts, such as existential psychology and Gothic literature, and proposes its implications in modern films like "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button" and in Shakespearean sonnets. Furthermore, it should extend to encompass the perspectives of elderly individuals regarding ageism.

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