

The Divided Psyche: A Freudian Analysis of Id, Ego, and Superego in The Picture of Dorian Gray

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Abstract:

This paper looks at the conflict in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* through the psychoanalytic framework of Sigmund Freud, focusing specifically on his structural model of the id, ego, and superego. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is often studied as a story about beauty, aestheticism, and moral corruption. It is also a deep exploration of the human psyche and the consequences of internal imbalance. This study argues that Lord Henry Wotton represents the id because he always encourages hedonism and unrestrained desire. Basil Hallward represents the superego because he has moral convictions and a conscientious sensibility. Dorian Gray is like the ego, always trying to balance between temptation and morality. The portrait is also analyzed as a symbol of the mind, revealing Dorian's hidden guilt and psychological deterioration. This study uses textual analysis and psychoanalytic criticism to show that Dorian's downfall is not caused by a single event but by the gradual breakdown of balance in his psyche. The paper also highlights how Wilde's novel anticipates ideas even before they were formally written down. Ultimately, this study shows that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is not a story about aestheticism and corruption but a deep exploration of identity, repression, guilt, and the divided self.

Keywords: psychoanalysis, id, ego, superego, Freud, psychological conflict, unconscious mind, identity, moral corruption, hedonism, etc.

1. Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory

Sigmund Freud first discussed psychoanalysis in 1896. The structural model of the id, ego, and superego was developed later between 1900 and 1930 as Freud continued to refine his understanding of the mind. The id, ego, and superego are the parts of the human personality, according to Freud. The id works in the unconscious. It is driven by the pleasure principle, which means it wants to satisfy its needs and desires right away. The id does not consider what's real or what is right or wrong. It just wants what it wants. It wants it now. The ego is different. It is like a mediator between the id and the real world. The ego knows that not all desires can be fulfilled. It tries to balance between what the id wants and what is possible in reality. The ego is connected to the unconscious. It also knows what is real and tries to protect itself. The superego is like a conscience. It develops as we grow up and learn what is right and wrong from our family and culture. The superego helps us control our instincts and do what is right. Without the superego, we would only do what we want. That would lead to problems.

2. Critical Reception of Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory

Freud's ideas have been very influential. They have also been criticized a lot. Some people do not like that Freud focused much on sex and hidden desires. They think that his ideas are not scientific. Karl Popper said that Freud's ideas are not testable, so they are not science. Philosopher Simone de. Feminist Kate Millett said that Freud's ideas are based on fashioned views of women and men. Behaviorist B. F. Skinner said that Freud's ideas are not observable, so they are not real. Even with these criticisms, Freud's ideas are still very important in psychology and literature.

If *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is read on the surface, one might think it is about beauty, art, and how people can be bad. The novel is actually very deep and explores the inner life of the main character, Dorian Gray. Dorian looks perfect on the outside. Inside, he is falling apart.

This inner conflict in *Dorian Gray* is clearer when viewed through a particular lens. Freud's ideas about the id, ego, and superego help us understand Dorian's transformation and destruction. Lord Henry Wotton is like the id, always encouraging Dorian to do what he wants. Basil Hallward is like the superego, always trying to do what is right. Dorian is like the ego, trying to balance between the two. The way Dorian falls apart is very important. It does not happen because of one thing. Because of many choices he makes over time. When Lord Henry says that the only way to get rid of a temptation is to give in to it, it sounds clever at first. Over time, it becomes a reason Dorian lives an increasingly disordered life.

3. Methodology

This study uses an interpretive approach, based on close reading and psychoanalytic literary criticism. The main idea comes from Freud's model of the psyche, which is used to understand the characters and the story. The study examines moments in the novel, such as key conversations and psychological turning points, to see how the characters function as psychological agents. These moments are analyzed in terms of the id, ego, and superego. The analysis also draws on sources such as Richard Ellmann's biography of Wilde and Regenia Gagnier's analysis of individualism and Victorian culture. The goal is to combine theory with literary analysis in a way that respects the complexity of both.

4. Literature Review and the research gap

Many scholars have written about *The Picture of Dorian Gray* using approaches such as aesthetic theory, moral philosophy, and cultural historicism. Early readers saw the novel as a warning against being too selfish. Later scholars looked more deeply into aspects of the novel. Ellmann said that Wilde was interested in the difference between how things appear and what's really true. This is clear in Dorian's life, where he looks perfect on the outside but is falling apart on the inside. Gagnier said that the novel shows the tension between what's considered normal and what people really want. This tension is like the conflict between the id and the superego. Some scholars have used ideas to understand the characters, but these readings have been limited. This study fills this gap by analyzing how the id, ego, and superego function in the novel.

The Picture of Dorian Gray is a widely discussed book. Many people have written about the theme of duality and self-division in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Most of these analyses do not really explore the

mechanics of Freud's structural model. They mention conflict" or "division" without really looking at how the id, ego, and superego work together in the story.

There is another gap in the research. The portrait in the story is usually seen as a symbol of corruption or aesthetic transgression. If we look at it from a Freudian perspective, the portrait is more than that. It is a representation of the unconscious, a place where repressed guilt and suppressed self-knowledge are stored. This study will examine both gaps by applying the structural model to the text and exploring the portrait's function within Dorian's psychological world.

5. Discussion

Lord Henry Wotton is a character in the story. He is not a witty aristocrat or aesthetic provocateur. From the start, he tells Dorian to live life to the fullest and pursue his desires. He says things like "live the life that is in you" and tells Dorian to indulge in pleasure and beauty. This is similar to the Freudian id, which is all about instinct and desire. Lord Henry's influence is not forceful. It is still very powerful. He leads Dorian to believe that desire is liberation and that he should not worry about responsibility or consequences.

This raises a question. Does Lord Henry cause Dorian's corruption? Was it already inside Dorian? The book does not answer, but it suggests that the id is not something outside us but rather a part of ourselves that requires certain conditions to emerge. In this reading, Lord Henry does not change Dorian. Rather creates the conditions for a part of Dorian's character to emerge.

Basil Hallward is another important character in the story. He is very different from Lord Henry. Basil sees beauty as connected to sensibility, and his art is shaped by his perception of Dorian's moral and physical perfection. Basil's role is similar to that of the superego, the internalized moral authority that monitors our conduct. Basil does not encourage Dorian to pursue his desires. Rather, he tries to protect him from moral corruption. He believes that sin shows on a person's face and that inner moral condition and outward identity are connected.

The confrontation between Basil and Dorian is a moment in the book. Basil sees the portrait. Immediately knows that something is wrong. He responds with a demand, asking Dorian to acknowledge and repent his transgressions. This is similar to the superego's function of pressing for accountability. Dorian's killing of Basil is a significant act. By killing Basil, Dorian eliminates the voice of conscience and destroys the superego's representative in his psychological world.

Dorian Gray is a character who is caught between influences. He is like the ego, which is the mediating agency that negotiates between competing demands. At the start of the book, Dorian is responsive to both Lord Henry's philosophy and Basil's moral sensibility. When he makes his famous wish, he disrupts this balance. His wish is to stay young and beautiful and to have the portrait age instead. This wish severs the connection between action and visible consequence, and Dorian loses the mechanism through which the ego enforces self-regulation.

The portrait is an element in this dynamic. It is an externalized representation of Dorian's unconscious, a space where repressed guilt and moral knowledge are stored. Each time Dorian does something, it shows

on the portrait. Dorian knows this. He reflects that the portrait would reveal his soul. This is similar to Freud's idea of the unconscious as a repository of hidden desires and suppressed guilt.

Dorian's relationship with the portrait is complicated. He does not just ignore it. He also returns to it compulsively. This suggests that his conscience is not completely gone but repressed. The portrait is a source of unease, and as Dorian's life of indulgence intensifies, this tension becomes harder to manage. He becomes detached from his life, relating to it as if it were a spectacle rather than something he is living. This detachment reflects the fragmentation of the ego, and the gap between appearance and interiority widens.

The end of the book is a crisis point. Dorian decides to destroy the portrait, thinking it will free him from guilt. This is a misunderstanding. The portrait is not the cause of his corruption. Rather, it is a record of it. When he stabs the canvas, he is attacking the repository of his self-knowledge. The result is his death and the discovery of his loathsome corpse. The portrait on the hand returns to its original beauty. This inversion is the book's psychological insight: the self cannot be divided against itself forever.

From a perspective, the ending shows that the psyche is a system. The id, ego, and superego are not independent, but interdependent. If one of them is suppressed or destroyed, the whole system is destabilized. Dorian's story shows what happens when desire overwhelms regulation, and the ego fails to mediate. The book does not say that Dorian is not responsible for his actions. His downfall is the result of external influence and his own choices.

6. Conclusion

This analysis shows that a psychoanalytic reading of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* can help us understand the book's architecture. The three main characters represent the id, ego, and superego. Their interactions show the internal conflicts that Freud identified as fundamental to human psychology. Dorian's destruction results from an internal imbalance, a failure of the ego to mediate between desire and moral regulation. The portrait is an externalization of the unconscious, making visible the guilt and self-knowledge that Dorian's ego refuses to acknowledge. The book's conclusion confirms that psychological coherence depends on the balance of the psyche's structures and that trying to separate desire from conscience leads to self-destruction.

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