

PECULIARITIES OF REPRESENTATION OF THE CONCEPT OF “ART” IN  
THE NOVEL “THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY” BY O. WILDE

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**Abstract.** *The article under consideration presents the perspective of hypertrophied self-reflection of artists, which was realized in the works of representatives of different cultural epochs based on the specifics of the presentation of the concept of “art.” The primary focus is analyzing the peculiarities of interpreting this concept in the novel “The Picture of Dorian Gray” by the English writer Oscar Wilde, which became the key to realizing the author’s main idea. The modeling of the text of the work takes place through the implementation of this concept, which is a priority in the work. This happens through the portrait.*

*The article suggests that the author’s use of a portrait is not accidental because, in our opinion, a picture is a kind of portal that connects the artist and the person depicted on the canvas, and in the case of the novel – three: the writer, the artist and the person depicted on it. The portrait is the materialization of the concept, and it focuses on all the variants of the specifics of its manifestation.*

*Wilde considers art the highest form of being, as it is both a source of pleasure and destructive power. The focus is on the relationship between aestheticism, morality, and philosophical ideas that determine the behavior of the characters, in particular Dorian Gray. The article also analyses the symbolic role of the portrait, which appears not only as an artistic work but also as a personification of the hero’s soul and moral state. The study has shown that the novel’s concept of “art” is a key tool for revealing the central conflict between aesthetic pleasure and ethical principles. The main conclusion is that art in the novel is not a neutral category but has the ability to influence a person’s moral choice, emphasizing the inextricable link between beauty and responsibility.*

**Keywords:** *art, aestheticism, morality, Oscar Wilde, Dorian Gray, portrait, ethics, symbolism, aesthetic pleasure.*

**Received:** 20 July 2024

**Revised:** 28 July 2024

**Accepted:** 02 August 2024

**How to cite:** Khairulina N., Dmytrenko V. (2024). Peculiarities of Representation of the Concept of “Art” in the Novel “The Picture of Dorian Gray” by O. Wilde. *Philological Treatises*, 16(2), 61-69 [https://www.doi.org/10.21272/Ftrk.2024.16\(2\)-6](https://www.doi.org/10.21272/Ftrk.2024.16(2)-6)



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## ОСОБЛИВОСТІ РЕПРЕЗЕНТАЦІЇ КОНЦЕПТУ «МИСТЕЦТВО» У РОМАНІ «ПОРТРЕТ ДОРІАНА ГРЕЯ» О. ВАЙЛДА

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**Анотація.** У статті репрезентовано ракурс гіпертрофованої саморефлексії митців, яка зреалізувалася у творчості представників різних культурних епох на основі специфіки представлення концепту “мистецтво”. Основна увага заціентована на аналізі особливостей інтерпретації цього концепту у романі “Портрет Доріана Грея” англійського письменника Оскара Вайлда, що став ключовим для реалізації основного задуму автора. Моделювання тексту твору відбувається завдяки реалізації цього концепту, який є пріоритетним у творі. Це відбувається через портрет.

У статті висловлена думка про те, що використання автором саме портрета є не випадковим, адже на нашу думку, портрет є своєрідним порталом, що пов’язує художника і людину, що зображена на полотні, а у випадку із романом – трьох: письменника, художника й того, хто зображений на ньому. Портрет є матеріалізацією концепту в ньому фокусуються усі варіанти специфіки його виявлення.

Вайлд розглядає мистецтво як вищу форму буття, яка водночас є джерелом насолоди та руйнівної сили. Основна увага приділяється взаємозв’язку між естетизмом, мораллю та філософськими ідеями, які визначають поведінку героїв, зокрема Доріана Грея. У статті також аналізується символічна роль портрета, що постає не лише як художній витвір, а й як уособлення душі та морального стану героя. Дослідження виявило, що концепт “мистецтво” у романі виступає ключовим інструментом для розкриття основного конфлікту між естетичною насолодою та етичними принципами. Головний висновок полягає в тому, що мистецтво в романі є не нейтральною категорією, а має здатність впливати на моральний вибір людини, підкреслюючи нерозривний зв’язок між красою та відповідальністю.

**Ключові слова:** мистецтво, естетизм, мораль, Оскар Вайлд, Доріан Грей, портрет, етика, символізм, естетична насолода.

**Отримано:** 20 липня 2024 р.

**Отримано після доопрацювання:** 28 липня 2024 р.

**Затверджено:** 02 серпня 2024 р.

**Як цитувати:** Хайруліна Н., Дмитренко В. (2024). Особливості репрезентації концепту «мистецтво» у романі «Портрет Доріана Грея» О. Вайлда. *Філологічні трактати*, 16(2)б 61-69 [https://www.doi.org/10.21272/Ftrk.2024.16\(2\)-6](https://www.doi.org/10.21272/Ftrk.2024.16(2)-6)

### Introduction

This year, the progressive community celebrated the 170<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Oscar Wilde's birth, an outstanding English artist and classic of English literature. This was the occasion for another rethinking of his work from the twenty-first-century perspective.

The novel “The Picture of Dorian Gray” is undoubtedly the artist’s landmark work. It represents the Wilde’s idea of the concept of “art.” The study of the problems of art, artistic creativity, and the artist’s personality does not lose its relevance regardless of the socio-cultural situation, the state system, or the ideological state of the era.

The modern period of cultural development is no exception. However, in the context of forming a new type of culture — visual, screen, mass media — in the process of irreversible changes in all its spheres, these problems require a new understanding. Studying at the conceptual level opens up new perspectives for literary scholars to understand the artist's worldview, which determines the relevance of the publication.

**The study aims** to determine the peculiarities of the representation of the concept of “art” in O. Wilde’s novel “The Picture of Dorian Gray”. In this regard, it will single out the means of objectification of the concept in the writer’s work and investigate its importance as a means of modeling the text of the work.

**Object of study** the concept of ‘art’ in the novel “The Picture of Dorian Gray” by Oscar Wilde

**The subject of the study** is the peculiarities of the manifestation of the concept of “art” in Oscar Wilde’s novel “The Picture of Dorian Gray”.

#### **Research materials and methods**

The works of T. Sivets, L. Suvorov, V. Suprun, T. Shestopalova, Lakoff G., Johnson M., and others were the basis for the study of the term “concept” in literary studies. To study O. Wilde’s work, we relied on the publications of N. Astrakhan, V. Bratko, I. Malyska-Fedorovych, and E. Onatskyi.

The publication is based on conceptual analysis. The authors also used analytical and synthetic methods to analyze and synthesize the necessary information. A structural approach to the concepts and conceptual sphere of the writer's work is important for presenting the material in the publication.

#### **Discussion**

The theme of art, the image, and the artist’s fate have always been at the center of the attention of artists. It has attracted the attention of thinkers, writers, painters, and sculptors of different historical and cultural epochs to a greater or lesser extent.

Since Homer’s Odyssey, we have known the striking image of the blind singer Demodocus singing at the court of King Alcinous. The image of the artist Orpheus came to literature from ancient Greek myths, and the ancient Roman poet Horace first comprehended the role and place of the poet in particular and art in general in society. E. Hoffmann, O. de Balzac, N. Hohol, E. Poe, J. London, T. Mann, and M. Bulhakov can continue this line.

Furthermore, these are only the iconic figures of world literature. There are Taras Shevchenko, Ivan Franko, Lesya Ukrainka, Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi, Lina Kostenko, and others in Ukrainian literature.

The theory and practice of art as objects of artistic comprehension and depiction appeared in the works of the Enlightenment. Before the appearance of works by representatives of this period, the writer, as a human rather than a professional, portrayed the artist as a character in a work.

The author usually ignored his creative consciousness of what makes a poet a poet, a painter, a painter, a musician, and a musician. German literature played an important role in the development of the theme of art and the artist: at the end of the Enlightenment, Goethe published his famous novel “The Years of Wilhelm Meister” (1796), which is essentially the first Künstlerroman in European literature, and the theme was picked up and intensively developed by the German romantics Novalis and Hoffmann. In their works, they attach particular importance to the idea of freedom of artistic creativity and the idea of absolute arbitrariness of the artist. One of the ideologists of Romanticism, a representative of the idealistic dialectic, F. Schelling, stressed that any artistic creation should be free.

In England, a peculiar cult of the artist-creator dates back to the Romantic era: Byron’s poetry, Coleridge’s philosophical and literary concepts, autobiographical works by Lee Hunt and De Quincey gradually accustomed the Puritan public to the idea of the artist’s uniqueness, that is, his extraordinary, unlikeable nature, which inevitably leads to a sharp

conflict with the crowd and ostracism, although at the same time makes him responsible to people and for people.

The Romantic era elevated the artist to unattainable heights, seeing him as a “lord of the mind,” a prophet. “Poets,” Shelley wrote in his “Defence of Poetry” (1821), are priests of incomprehensible inspiration; mirrors reflecting the giant shadows that the future casts in the present, trumpets that call to battle and do not hear their call. Poets are the unrecognized lawmakers of the world’ (Shelley, 2018, p. 434). The recognition of art explains the “status” of the artist in this period as the most important area of the spiritual life of humankind. Art was considered a type of activity that could give a person a new view of the world and their place in it, introducing them to the highest truths of existence that are inaccessible to other ways of knowing.

The second half of the nineteenth century changed the vector of reception of artistic creativity. Writers’ interest is focused on the artist’s practical activities and place in society. The image of the artist loses its aura of exclusivity. The artist is no longer just a prophet, as in previous eras, but also a discoverer of truth, a creator of an ideal. His functions are expanding. Art should create and strive to convey what it has created to readers. Readers are the leading connoisseurs of art.

This topic became one of the priorities in the development process, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Art, in general, was understood as an independent sphere of spiritual life, in which the artist is subject only to God, and the object and ways of creative development are chosen following the inner needs of the creator. The interest in literary and literary criticism grew in the twentieth century. This is the reason for the significant number of works in which the artist and his creative activity were chosen as the main character and subject of the image.

### **The research results**

The English writer O. Wilde first articulated the issues of art theory in his lectures delivered during a tour to America. The key lecture was The English Renaissance of Art (1882). It gives an idea of the origins of ‘art’ in the writer’s work. The theme of his novel The Portrait of Dorian Gray can be formulated as follows: the temptation to equate art and life. That is why the concept of ‘art’ becomes significant.

“Oscar shared the opinion that the soul should comprehend art because only the soul can feel and express beauty, and, therefore, art is alien to archival logic, the laws of common sense, and the laws of morality; it serves no one and nothing, but exists only for the sake of art. To know it, you must burn” (Melnyk M., [https://modoslav.blogspot.com/2020/08/blog-post\\_9.html](https://modoslav.blogspot.com/2020/08/blog-post_9.html)).

The works of the English writer O. Wilde are known to every Ukrainian schoolchild, as his fairy tales and The Portrait of Dorian Gray are studied in the school course of foreign literature. However, the amplitude and frequency of studies of the writer’s work in Ukrainian literary studies are insignificant. M. Strikha, one of the contemporary Ukrainian translators and researchers of the English writer’s work, explains this by the fact that “Ukrainian modernist translators of the early twentieth century mostly did not know English (they focused on Polish, Russian, German, and French literature)” (Strikha, 2007, p. 139).

In addition, Ukrainians’ inertia in reception O. Wilde’s works was “fatally affected by the circumstances of the tragic twentieth century” (Strikha, 2007, p. 142).

The first translator of the novel The Portrait of Dorian Gray was V. Pidmohylnyi, and The Ballad of Reading Prison was translated by T. Osmachka (in his translation “The Ballad of Reading Prison” (1958), but due to well-known tragic circumstances, their translations never became the property of our translation school.

The concept of “art” is key in Wilde’s worldview. The term “concept” is derived from the Latin “concept,” which means, “something preconceived, imagined, imaginary.” A modern English dictionary defines this concept as “an idea of how something is or should be done” (Longman, 2009, p.151). That is, the essence of the term is defined through the idea of what something is or how something should be made. The Great Explanatory Dictionary of

the Modern Ukrainian Language (2003) defines a concept as “a formulation, a general concept, an idea” (Comprehensive Explanatory Dictionary, 2003, p. 452).

Today, the definition of the concept differs among some researchers depending on the field of study they represent. Some researchers believe that concepts are peculiar mental formations, fragments of a person's life experience that are realized and typified by him/her, stored in human memory, and are significant for him/her. Researchers emphasize that a person has experienced information.

The center of a concept is always a value because it serves the study of culture, which is based on a value principle. Each concept, as a complex mental component and its semantic content, also assesses a person's attitude to a particular object. Therefore, the concept includes a universal component that carries a universal load and is an element of the subconscious and a national and cultural component since a particular cultural environment also conditions each person's life. When forming the conceptsphere, one cannot but consider a person belonging to a particular social stratum, gender, age group, etc. A concept is a dynamic formation in human consciousness. It “has its immanent plan in the individual consciousness, where each most general concept passes through the filter of individual perception, resulting in a real, living idea of the subject for this consciousness” (Shestopalova, 2010, p. 37).

It is the dominant concept in a work that represents the peculiarities of the author's perception of reality, his or her particular picture of the world. It “sublimates the concepts, representations of emotions, feelings, volitional acts of the author, his worldview, determined by the author's worldview and genre specificity of the literary text” (Doichyk, 2014, p. 37).

A work of fiction best helps to reconstruct the peculiarities of the author's consciousness by identifying its structural units, such as concepts.

In the novel *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*, the main characters' dialogues are filled with reflections on art. The ending proves that the entire text was a preparation for the main idea of the work, which is the immortality of artistic masterpieces, that is, art itself.

Later, Mikhail Bulgakov would express this in the famous dictum “Manuscripts Do Not Burn.”

A work of art is the perfect thing created by man. It outlives its creator, often perpetuating his or her name, although the idea of the “death of the author,” postulated much later by R. Barthes, also runs through the work.

After all, the portrait in the work lives its own life; an outwardly nondescript author who could not influence what happened to his creation created such a perfect canvas. However, the text contains the invisible power of the painting, or art, which determines the degree of immortality and omniscience that leads the reader to the conclusions the author wants.

In addition to the portrait, Sybil's performance shows artistic perfection. Playing Shakespeare's characters, she became an artistic work herself. This attracted Dorian to her, but she could not interest him as an ordinary person. Her death caused the first changes in the portrait.

This means that O. Wilde again creates paradoxes; the separation of art from life leads to its distortion and immortality.

In developing the theme of art and the artist, writers from different countries show national specificity due to the peculiarities of the country's historical development and the originality of its artistic traditions.

Thus, in German literature, the interpretation of this theme takes on a philosophical and aesthetic character; in French literature, there is an active social and journalistic tendency, while in English literature, the social and ethical aspect, the connection between ethics and aesthetics, is in the foreground.

In nineteenth-century English literature, the theme of art and the artist was less extensively developed than, for example, in French or German literature. If English realists did address it, they developed it within the framework of the novel upbringing, mainly in

social and ethical terms (Dickens's "David Copperfield", Thackeray's "Pendennis and Newcomen").

The specificity of English national thinking in addressing the image of the artist and the theme of artistic creativity is manifested in the fact that while in German literature, the hero is most often a musician, in English literature, it is primarily a writer, less often an artist, a painter, that is, artists of different types of art are closer to the national character in different countries.

Interest in creativity and the artist's lifestyle in English society has been growing since the publication of John Ruskin's five-volume work *Modern Artists* (1843-1860). His doctrine of beauty influenced representatives of various artistic systems.

In particular, the realist John Galsworthy and the aesthete Oscar Wilde experienced the charm of his ideas. The latter, having inherited the cult of beauty from Ruskin, rejected the demand for highly moral Christian art he put forward and, following Walter Pater proclaimed the idea of art's freedom from any social and moral obligations. The writers of English aestheticism needed to depict the creative environment and its representatives primarily to prove their main point about the autonomy of art, about its superiority over reality, grey, miserable, hopeless, and its superior nature (the most striking example is O. Wilde's "The Picture of Dorian Gray").

Basil Hawthorne's meeting with the young Dorian Gray breathed new life into his work. "*Dorian Gray is just a motif in art for me,*" says Basil about the influence of Dorian's charm. Falling in love with perfect beauty gave him the gift of seeing things in a different light, which allowed him to get a premonition of discovering a new style and way of writing. He feels a new surge of strength: "*Meeting Dorian seemed to give me the key to something new in painting, opened up a new way of painting. Now, I see things in a different light and perceive everything differently. I can reproduce life in my art by means previously unknown to me*" (Wilde, 2020, p. 19).

The concept of art is realized through the portrait. We believe that the author's use of a portrait is not accidental because, in our opinion, a portrait is a kind of portal that connects the artist and the person depicted in the picture, and in the case of the novel, three: the writer, the artist, and the person depicted in it.

The novel's key dictum also confirms this: "*Art is a mirror that reflects the one who looks into it, not life*" (Wilde, 2020, p. 30). Basil Holloward is talented, not so much intellectually as intuitively. The ability of artists to foresee and reflect this in their work has become a fatal burden for the artist. He paints a portrait of a handsome young man, Dorian Gray, and this is the beginning of his path to nowhere. He puts so much of his soul and feelings into the portrait that he begins to think it is his best work. It exposes a part of his soul.

The artist feels that this canvas is very frank and unusual. He does not want to put the portrait on public display so that no one can see the secret of his soul, which is hidden in the portrait of Dorian Gray: "*I have put too much of my soul, too much of myself, into this canvas*" (Wilde, 2020, p. 19).

He painfully felt Beauty, its inevitability, timelessness. The beautiful is eternal, so Holyward's paintings are immortal, just like the characters depicted. Moreover, the artist himself is outwardly ugly. Wilde emphasized the striking contrast between the character's ugliness and the beauty of his soul, his instinctive aversion to immorality and evil as the highest forms of ugliness.

The "preface" on behalf of Wilde is further developed in Bezill's words about the essence of art: "*An artist must create beautiful works of art without bringing anything of his personal life into them <...>. We have lost the ability to perceive beauty abstractly. I hope one day to show the world what an abstract sense of beauty is*" (Wilde, 2020, p. 19).

Thus, Bezill's portrait was not a reflection of Dorian Gray's personality but the embodiment of the idea the artist had been searching for all his life.

A portrait is a purely aesthetic phenomenon; its creator is a person who did not lose a single particle of his spirituality until the end of his life.

Basil Holloward represents the type of artist for whom beauty and art are inseparable. For him, art is beauty, which he tries to make immortal with the help of his brush and his exceptional talent.

It was not the worship of beauty that destroyed the artist; the immorality of the object of the image mutilated his love and devotion to beauty. Life and the art that reflects it are closely linked: the vice that wins in the human soul can kill art.

One of the novel's central ideas is the idea of the responsibility of the creator, the artist. After all, Basil did not see what Sir Henry saw and felt in Dorian Gray: spiritual weakness, selfishness, and a tendency to self-admire. For this, Basil is punished at the end of the novel. Vice and art do not go together. Art has no beauty, perfection, or harmony without morality and soul.

### **Conclusions and prospects**

Thus, in "The Picture of Dorian Gray," O. Wilde presents his interpretation of the concept of "art," presents the concept of understanding art, and, as an accurate paradox list, destroys his statements and conclusions.

Two main maxims define the representation of the concept in the work.

1) Art is a mirror that reflects the person who looks at it, and the artist, having created an actual work, cannot change anything. The masterpiece lives its own life.

2) Morality of art (vice and art are incompatible; there is no beauty, perfection, and harmony in art without morality and soul).

We consider it is promising to study the conceptual sphere of the novel "The Picture of Dorian Gray," the entire work of the English writer in terms of the realization of the concept of "art" in it, and Oscar Wilde's work in general.

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