

Spring 2018

Dorian Gray's Misguided Pursuit of Individualism

Amber Beauchamp

University of North Georgia, anbeau4911@ung.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/eng_capstone



Part of the [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Beauchamp, Amber, "Dorian Gray's Misguided Pursuit of Individualism" (2018). *Department of English Capstone Abstracts*. 24.
https://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/eng_capstone/24

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of English at Nighthawks Open Institutional Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Department of English Capstone Abstracts by an authorized administrator of Nighthawks Open Institutional Repository.

Amber Beauchamp

Dr. Edelman

ENGL 4890

April 17, 2018

Abstract

Critical discussions of Oscar Wilde's only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, often focus on the author's personal life instead of his skill as an artist and fail to critique his work as more than a reflection of his persona. Prior critical discussions often focus on Oscar Wilde's reflection through the character of Dorian Gray as the protagonist and Lord Henry as the antagonist, or the immorality of the novel because of Dorian's character and the lifestyle that Wilde supposedly flaunts and advocates in the novel. This focus on Oscar Wilde's life creates a gap in how his work is studied and how it was intended for the Victorian audience. The critical analysis has been limited to homosexual anxieties instead of allowing a deeper critical analysis over the content. New scholarship and critical discussions attempt to put Oscar Wilde's skill as an author above the focus on his life and Trials of Oscar Wilde for gross indecency. Rather than providing a reflection of Wilde's personal characteristics, *Dorian Gray* offers a protagonist in search of an ideal, individuality. Dorian Gray's failure in achieving an ideal balance of individuality was Oscar Wilde's negative commentary on the philosophy of individualism. In Victorian England, the philosophy of Utilitarianism was highly favored amongst society, and Dorian's practice of individualism was at odds with the values associated to Utilitarianism. Dorian spends his lifetime, and the novel's plot, searching for his own interpretation of what creates a balanced life of individualism and often fails in his attempts. The critical focus is on Wilde's text, leaving aside the author's personal life, and analyzing *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as a conversation on the negative traits associated with a continually misguided and inappropriate attempt to practice the philosophy of individualism.

Keywords: Oscar Wilde, Dorian Gray, Individualism, Utilitarianism