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“THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY”: MIRRORING THE UNCANNY VALLEY EFFECT

This paper explores the intricate relationship between art, morality, and the manifestation of the uncanny in Oscar Wilde’s seminal novel, “The Picture of Dorian Gray”. Drawing upon psychoanalytic perspectives and Gothic literary elements, the study examines the novel’s distinct portrayal of the bond between the protagonist, Dorian Gray, and his haunting portrait. Unlike traditional Victorian Gothic tales, where supernatural entities embody the uncanny, Wilde’s work presents the portrait as a reflection of Dorian’s moral decay, rendering it a monstrous entity. The paper explores the amalgamation of the novel’s primary characters – Basil Hallward, Lord Henry, and Dorian – into a single entity, mirroring the artist’s role in bestowing the portrait with a soul, defying the natural order. The analysis delves into the concept of the uncanny valley, which the portrait enters as it exhibits its dynamic nature, altering perceptions across three stages, culminating in a grotesque, life-like form. The research draws parallels between Freud’s notions of the uncanny and the novel’s portrayal of death, corpses, and the doppelganger, ultimately examining the theme of creator versus creation and the consequences of disrupting the natural order.

According to Masahiro Mori, the uncanny valley effect occurs when an object is absolutely human-like, yet reveals its non-human essence. Dorian Gray’s portrait enters the uncanny valley as soon as it exhibits its dynamic nature, and when Dorian loses his human qualities both morally and physically. He surrenders a part of his “humanity” to the portrait. The reader’s perception of Dorian’s image and portrait changes in three stages: from positive to negative as Dorian’s self-destruction progresses. In the end, the picture takes on the characteristics of a moving dead. The third stage of the novel is Dorian Gray’s death and the restoration of the portrait’s original appearance. The reader is most disgusted at the moment when Dorian reaches the apex of his fall, and this is reflected in the portrait, which looks extremely ugly. The effect is reinforced by the presence of two uncanny creatures (Dorian and his picture) instead of a single one.

Key words: *The Picture of Dorian Gray, Gothic literature, the uncanny, uncanny valley, creator vs creation, allusions, morality, paradox of the ugly, doppelganger.*

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«ПОРТРЕТ ДОРІАНА ГРЕЯ»: ВІДДЗЕРКАЛЕННЯ ЕФЕКТУ МОТОРОШНОЇ ДОЛИНИ

У статті досліджується складний взаємозв'язок між мистецтвом, мораллю та проявами надприродного у знаковому романі Оскара Вайльда «Портрет Доріана Грея». Спираючись на психоаналітичну перспективу та готичні літературні елементи, дослідження розглядає чітке зображення в романі зв'язку між головним героєм, Доріаном Греєм, та його портретом-переслідувачем. На відміну від традиційних вікторіанських готичних оповідань, де надприродні істоти уособлювали моторошне, у творі Уайльда портрет є відображенням морального занепаду Доріана, що перетворює його на жахливу істоту. У статті досліджується злиття ключових персонажів роману – Безіла Голворда, лорда Генрі та Доріана – в єдине ціле, що віддзеркалює роль художника у наділенні портрета душею, який кидає виклик природному порядку. Аналіз заглиблюється в гіпотезу моторошної долини, до якої потрапляє портрет, демонструючи свою динамічну природу, змінюючи сприйняття впродовж трьох етапів, досягаючи кульмінації у гротескній, життєподібній формі. Дослідження проводить паралелі між уявленнями Фрейда про надприродне та зображенням смерті, трупів і двійника в романі, зрештою, досліджуючи тему творця проти творіння та наслідки порушення природного порядку.

За словами Масахіро Морі, ефект моторошної долини виникає тоді, коли об'єкт абсолютно людиноподібний, але виявляє свою нелюдську сутність. Портрет Доріана Грея потрапляє в моторошну долину, ційно він виявляє свою динамічну природу, і коли Доріан втрачає свої людські якості як морально, так і фізично. Він віддає портрету частину своєї «людяності». Сприйняття читачем образу Доріана і портрета змінюється в три етапи: від позитивного до негативного в міру того, як прогресує саморуїнування Доріана. Зрештою, картина набуває характеристик рухливого мерця. Третій етап роману – смерть Доріана Грея і відновлення первісного вигляду портрета. Найбільшу огиду у читача викликає момент, коли Доріан досягає апогею свого падіння, і це відображається на портреті, який виглядає вкрай потворно. Ефект посилюється завдяки присутності двох моторошних істот (Доріана і його портрета), замість однієї.

Ключові слова: «Портрет Доріана Грея», готична література, моторошне, моторошна долина, творець проти творіння, алюзії, мораль, парадокс потворного, двійник.

Formulation of the problem. The multifacetedness and multilayeredness of the novel, and its numerous subtexts are noted by many researchers. The fact that the novel itself is an interpretation of the myth of Narcissus is commonplace and probably does not require discussion. Much more promising, in our opinion, is the study of the problem of the interconnection of life and art, as well as the tools that the author uses to give his reader a strong sense of unease. One of the aspects that help to better understand the mechanisms of influence on the reader, embedded in the novel, is its consideration

through the prism of the theory of the uncanny valley effect.

The only novel by Oscar Wilde, “The Picture of Dorian Gray” still arouses vivid discussion and harsh polemics. Published back in 1890, it was highly unwelcome by many critics and the public, as it demonstrated public vices and sins. The author was careful enough not to name them directly, but to place the mirror the way to reflect the reader’s image. As Wilde states in his letter to the editor of the “Scots Observer”, “Each man sees his own sin in Dorian Gray. What Dorian Gray’s sins are no one knows. He

who finds them has brought them" (Holland, Hart-Davies, 2000: 439). Namely, the novel itself is a mirror reflecting a spectator, its reader. What might be more irritating and scandalous than to associate oneself with an obviously vicious fictional character?

Depicting the society as it was, not just Dorian Gray himself seems to be the major reason why Wilde chose the word "picture" instead of "portrait" for the title of the novel. This choice reflects his intention to emphasize the symbolic and artistic nature of the protagonist's image. The term "picture" conveys a broader, more encompassing representation, suggesting the fusion of art and life. Wilde, known for his aesthetic ideals, aimed to explore the relationship between art and morality in the novel. The use of the word "picture" implies a dynamic portrayal that goes beyond a static, traditional portrait, aligning with Wilde's desire to convey the transformative power of art and its impact on the perception of beauty and morality. Moreover, it emphasizes that Dorian is not an object, but an actor, a subject of the portrait's magic creation and, prospectively, of all its changes.

Research analysis. In the essay "Dorian Gray and the Gothic Novel" L. J. Poteet surveys possible connections between *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Charles Robert Maturin's "Melmoth the Wanderer", maintaining that "Wilde in fact may be said to have written a version of Gothic novel, giving the form contemporary dimensions" (Poteet, 1971: 33). Wilde's version of the Gothic novel in "The Picture of Dorian Gray" incorporates elements of decadence, aestheticism, and the exploration of the dark side of human nature within a modern context. Indeed, both "The Picture of Dorian Gray" and "Melmoth the Wanderer" explore themes of moral corruption and the consequences of indulging in one's darkest desires. However, while "Melmoth the Wanderer" primarily deals with supernatural elements and the Faustian bargain, Wilde's novel delves into the psychological aspects of sin and the destructive power of beauty and vanity. Decadence plays a central role in "The Picture of Dorian Gray", as it represents the pursuit of pleasure, beauty, and indulgence without any moral restraint. Wilde uses decadence to depict the corrupting influence of society on the protagonist, Dorian Gray, and to explore the destructive consequences of unchecked desires and hedonism. By intertwining themes of art, beauty, and moral corruption, Wilde brings a fresh perspective to the genre, showcasing the societal concerns and anxieties of his time.

David Punter in his essay demonstrates how Gothic literature by Robert Louis Stevenson, Oscar Wilde, H. G. Wells, Bram Stoker, and Arthur Machen exhibit Decadence and argues that each work ques-

tions the possibility of changing a civilization, or "decline", while maintaining its national and cultural identity (Punter, 1996: 1–26).

Z. Şahin Bektaş analyzes "The Picture of Dorian Gray" through a psychoanalytic lens to understand the characters better. Her study focuses on Dorian Gray, whose troubled past causes an identity crisis, leading to a fragmented self. Lord Henry and Basil Hallward are examined as foil characters, with Lord Henry representing Dorian's id and Basil his superego. The study also explores the uncanny elements in the novel, such as the attic and the portrait, as tools for Dorian's uncanny experiences. Overall, according to the researcher, the novel portrays the struggle between inner desires and societal norms, highlighting the individual's mental and physical challenges in finding a balance (Bektaş, 2019: 56–59).

In his work "Monstrorum Artifex: Uncanny Narrative Contexture and Narcissism in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*" (Wenaus, 2014: 57–76), A. Wenaus delves into the concept of denotative ambiguity, specifically focusing on the term "heimlich" and its usage in Oscar Wilde's narrative and Sigmund Freud's essay on the uncanny. Denotative ambiguity pertains to a word having various meanings or interpretations. The text posits that "heimlich" embodies this ambiguity by simultaneously representing conflicting ideas or symbols. This dual nature establishes a form of equilibrium or "semantic homeostasis", where the word retains a consistent meaning through the clash of its interpretations. "Heimlich" is depicted as striving for internal balance despite undergoing constant reorganization due to its dual interpretations. This quality of "heimlich" is likened to the structure of Freud's essay, which is noted for its similar ambiguity and self-reflection. The essay is capable of conveying two meanings simultaneously, contributing to its intricate composition.

Furthermore, the text draws a comparison between the ambiguous essence of "heimlich" and the narrative structure of Wilde's novel, suggesting a shared metonymical loop – a rhetorical device where a thing is referred to by a closely associated name. In essence, the analysis offers a literary examination of the intricate interplay between words with multiple meanings and how this ambiguity is mirrored in the frameworks of both Wilde's narratives and Freud's psychoanalytic works.

Thus, the presence of the uncanny in "The Picture of Dorian Gray" is unquestionable. Serving as a component of literary Gothic, it significantly contributes to the decadent ambience of the novel and is thoroughly examined within this framework.

The purpose of this study is to explain the mechanisms of the uncanny valley effect and the way they were used in the novel by Oscar Wilde.

Presentation of the main material. What aroused our scholarly curiosity was the question: what makes Wilde’s novel different? Why is it so unique among other Victorian Gothic tales?

First of all, we believe the difference is in the relationship between the main character and his artefact. Unlike traditional gothic narratives, where the magical artefact is mostly ancient or acquired, the magic of Dorian Gray’s portrait is born from the will of its owner and, therefore, entirely dependent on him. Thus, we have an opposite situation: it is not the artefact (the portrait) that influences Dorian, but rather, the character, through his unworthy actions, exerts a destructive influence on the work of art, which is neutral from an ethical point of view. After all, the portrait itself is neither good nor evil; it is the moral degradation of Dorian that makes it monstrous. To be more precise, magic arises due to the influence of several elements, as the creator of the portrait is presented in three aspects. We have combined the three main characters of the novel into one figure not by chance. Oscar Wilde himself wrote: “Basil Hallward is what I think I am; Lord Henry what the world thinks of me; Dorian what I would like to be – in other ages perhaps” (Holland, Hart-Davies, 2000: 352). Thus, Hallward is a reflection of the author as an artist, Lord Henry represents the dark side of his personality, or temptation, and Dorian embodies his desire for perfection. The combination of these three elements gives rise to the magical abilities of the portrait, and here we can see a reference to the biblical myth of the creation of man in its Christian interpretation of God the Creator as a trinity. Just as God breathed life into the body of man created from clay (or earth, according to another version), the artist endowed the portrait with a soul. It is relevant to recall the myth of Prometheus here. The artist Basil Hallward, by painting a portrait that draws all the evil and repulsive aspects of Dorian’s soul and body onto himself, inadvertently becomes the creator of his fate. He goes against God, disrupting the natural order of things and altering human nature, and pays for it with his life, suffering at the hands of his creation. Additionally, the novel presents two aspects of Prometheus: Lord Henry Wotton as a trickster and Basil Hallward as a creator. Furthermore, when Dorian discovers the properties of the portrait and realizes his impunity, the portrait itself begins to influence Dorian’s consciousness. Finally, when Dorian attempts to destroy the portrait, he meets his own demise, as he sees his reflection in the portrait (for “It is the spectator, and

not life, that art really mirrors”) (Wilde, 2012: 239). In other words, the portrait reveals the true Dorian. That is why after Dorian’s death, the portrait reverts to its original appearance, as it, as an embodiment of art, was not inherently monstrous but merely reflected its spectator, Dorian. The theme of creator versus creation is very conspicuous in the novel. Through the characters of Basil Hallward, the artist who creates the portrait, and Lord Henry Wotton, who tempts and corrupts Dorian, we see the power and responsibility that comes with being a creator. The novel explores the consequences of disrupting the natural order of things, altering human nature, and the destructive forces that can be unleashed when the creator loses control over their creation. To be more precise, magic emerges through the interplay of various elements, as the creator of the portrait is portrayed in three facets, as illustrated in Figure 1.

The fusion of these three components gives rise to the mystical powers of the portrait, and we can discern a reference to the biblical tale of the creation of man in its Christian interpretation of God the Creator as a trinity. Just as God breathed life into the body of man formed from clay (or earth, according to another version), the artist bestowed the portrait with a soul. It is pertinent to recall the myth of Prometheus here. The artist Basil Hallward, by painting a portrait that encapsulates all the wicked and repugnant facets of Dorian’s soul and physique, inadvertently becomes the architect of his destiny. He defies God, disrupting the natural order of things and altering human nature, and pays the price with his life, suffering at the hands of his creation. Additionally, the novel presents two facets of Prometheus: Lord Henry Wotton as a trickster and Basil Hallward as a creator. Like in “Frankenstein” by Mary Shelley, the unnatural, artificial creation gets out of its creator’s control. Both works also present the creators as figures who play

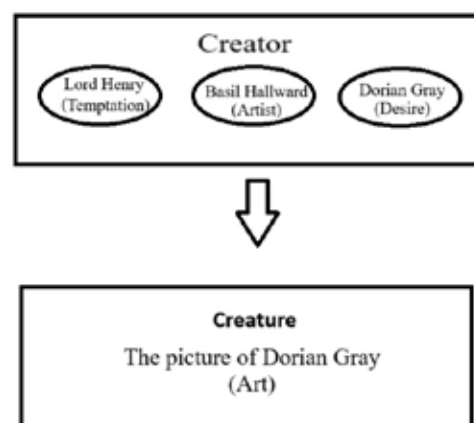


Fig. 1. Creation of magic in “The Picture of Dorian Gray”

God, attempting to usurp the divine power of creation. Frankenstein, through his scientific endeavours, seeks to create life from inanimate matter, while Basil Hallward bestows a soul upon an inanimate portrait, disrupting the natural order of things. The reference to the biblical tale of creation and the myth of Prometheus further reinforces the parallel between the two works. Just as Prometheus defied the gods by stealing fire and gifting it to humanity, the artists in these stories defy the natural order by imbuing their creations with life or soul, ultimately leading to their downfall.

The consequences of these acts are severe, as the creators pay the ultimate price for their transgressions. Mary Shelley's Frankenstein is haunted and tormented by his creation, while Basil Hallward is murdered by the very being whose soul he captured in the portrait.

Moreover, when Dorian uncovers the properties of the portrait and realizes his invulnerability, the portrait itself begins to influence Dorian's psyche. Ultimately, when Dorian endeavours to obliterate the portrait, he meets his downfall, as he beholds his reflection in the portrait (for art should mirror its spectator). In essence, the portrait unveils the authentic Dorian. Hence, following Dorian's demise, the portrait reverts to its original form, as it, as an embodiment of art, was not inherently monstrous but merely reflected its spectator, Dorian. The novel delves into the repercussions of disrupting the natural order of things, altering human nature, and the destructive forces that can be unleashed when the creator loses control over their creation.

This destruction and irregularity bring us to one of the key devices of Gothic literature – what English-speaking critics call the "uncanny", "eerie" or "horrible". It is a complicated concept in psychology that can be felt in reality and literature. It can be generally described as a sensation of being disturbed by something that is both strange and familiar, or a feeling of something being off, like seeing a realistic replica of yourself or the apparition of someone who you know is deceased.

In psychoanalysis, this term was first introduced by Sigmund Freud in his article "The Uncanny" (Freud, 1919: 249). The basic idea was that we are not afraid of what seems unknown, alien to us, but rather of what seems familiar. In Gothic prose, one of the ways how the uncanny is embodied is through various anthropomorphic creatures and objects that are not human: dolls, wax figures, and mechanical toys. This line can be continued with such images of "mystical" literature as the ghost, the vampire, and the doppelganger. The psychoanalytic notion of the

uncanny, as explored by Sigmund Freud, intersects with two other philosophical categories, Immanuel Kant's "sublime" and Nelson Goodman's "paradox of the ugly", in intriguing ways. Kant's concept of the sublime refers to experiences that evoke a sense of awe and transcendence, often through encounters with vastness or overwhelming power. This parallels the ability of the uncanny to evoke feelings of unease and discomfort through the familiar made strange. Goodman's "paradox of the ugly" challenges traditional aesthetic norms by suggesting that certain artworks can be considered ugly yet still possess aesthetic value. This notion resonates with the ability of the uncanny to disrupt our expectations and challenge our perceptions of reality, blurring the boundaries between the beautiful and the unsettling. Together, these philosophical categories offer a rich tapestry of ideas that illuminate the complexities of human experience and how art and literature can provoke profound emotional responses.

Kant's "sublime" is an aesthetic category that expresses the intrinsic significance of objects and phenomena that, in their ideal content, go far beyond their actual forms of expression. It is something that we are aware of and that gives us a sense of its greatness or even holiness. This concept is much broader than the concept of beauty, it is associated with a sense of inaccessibility and immensity, and thus it evokes wonder, awe, and even fear. Aesthetically, it is related to Freud's uncanny, which also refers to the unusual, feeling of horror at seemingly familiar objects revealed from an unexpected angle. The very word "unheimlich" in German is a lexical antonym of the word "heimlich" ("secret") and contains the root "Heim" ("house"). That is, it is something that does not want to remain hidden and at the same time goes beyond "home", i.e. the usual environment. Thus, Freud's "unheimlich" is not only uncanny but also "incredible", where the unusual (the fantastic) disguises itself as the everyday. In this aspect Freud quotes Schelling: "The terrible is what should be hidden but has revealed itself" (Freud, 1919: 423).

Freud explains the experience of the uncanny in various Gothic ways, some of which are mentioned below. Something that should have stayed hidden and secret, but has been revealed. Many people feel the feeling in the most intense way about death and corpses, to the reappearance of the dead and ghosts and spirits. It certainly belongs to all that's horrible, to all that causes fear and awe.

Freud's most significant remark about the uncanny relates to the double. He illustrates the uncanniness of the double using the following examples. Human doubles, that is people who share some similarity,

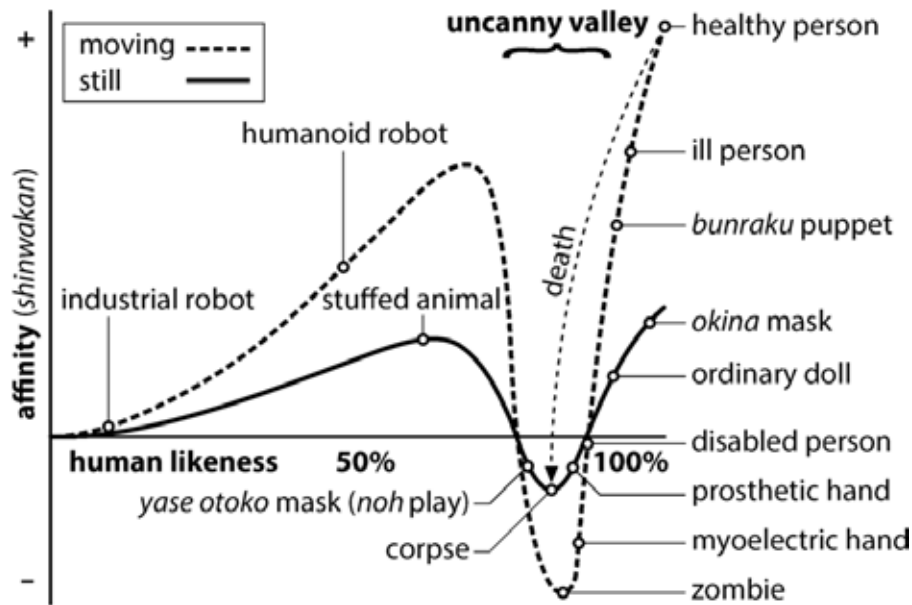


Fig. 2. As per Mori's graph, affinity rises as an object's resemblance grows until its remaining nonhuman traits become prominent and unsettling, making it seem so human that its remaining nonhuman traits become apparent and disturbing

duplicating, splitting and swapping the self. Object doubles, things that resemble humans but aren't, like robots, wax figures, puppets, ghosts and the paranormal, masks and costumes. And a feeling of intellectual doubt, wondering whether something is a realistic object or a real person. This is sometimes called the uncanny valley (Figure 2). The concept of the "uncanny valley" was first introduced by Masahiro Mori in 1970 (Mori, 1970: 33–35). He envisioned the way people would react to robots that appeared and acted almost like humans, and he provided some examples to support his idea. He suggested that as the robot's appearance became more human-like, people's affinity for it increased until they suddenly perceived the faces as eerie. However, as the robot's human likeness continued to grow, the eeriness was replaced by likeability.

Mori himself believed that the effect is related to the fear of death. According to his diagram, we are most afraid of the dead, and even more afraid of moving dead (for example, zombies or vampires) (Mori, 1970: 33–35). Hence, the uncanny valley occurs when the object being observed is almost human-like, yet reveals its non-human essence. The portrait of Dorian Gray enters the uncanny valley as soon as it exhibits its dynamic nature, particularly when Dorian notices alterations in it. However, Dorian begins to appear less human when his appearance remains fixed while his portrait changes.

Dorian loses his human qualities both morally and physically: his inner world becomes ugly (as reflected in the portrait), but at the same time his body loses the

ability to change. Like a vampire's body, it is frozen in the state in which it was caught by the curse. Life is associated with change, which is absent from Dorian's outer shell, so he is no longer alive in the fullest sense, surrendering this part of his "humanity" to the portrait. Dorian thus becomes unnatural, artificial. His image, as we noted earlier, resembles a vampire or a mechanical doll. The changes in Dorian's image and portrait occur in three stages. Accordingly, the reader's perception of them is different at each of these three stages. The first stage is the starting point, when Dorian's personality has not yet been destroyed and his portrait shows no signs of being a living object. At this stage, the reader's perception of Dorian is positive, and the portrait is neutral. The second stage is the active one, in which Dorian's self-destruction progresses and the reader is shown the changes that are occurring in the portrait. At this stage, Dorian retains only a human likeness, but is no longer human, because life is associated with development, change, and ageing. Therefore, Dorian is perceived more like a mechanical puppet or a vampire. The portrait, on the other hand, has the qualities of a living object: it is ageing, and all of Dorian's sins are reflected in it. Finally, the portrait takes on the characteristics of a walking dead man: it shows signs of destruction and decay, but at the same time it continues to "live", reflecting the degree of Dorian's destruction. The third stage is Dorian's death and the restoration of the portrait's original appearance. At this stage, Dorian is already perceived as a corpse, and his portrait is perceived as a neutral object, which is what it appears to be – an inanimate object. Thus, the

reader is most disgusted at the moment when Dorian reaches the apex of his fall, and this is reflected in the portrait, which looks extremely ugly.

Here lays the moral of the novel as explained by Wilde: "All excess, as well as all renunciation, brings its own punishment. The painter, Basil Hallward, worshipping physical beauty far too much, as most painters do, dies by the hand of one in whose soul he has created a monstrous and absurd vanity. Dorian Gray, having led a life of mere sensation and pleasure, tries to kill conscience, and at that moment kills himself. Lord Henry Wotton seeks to be merely the spectator of life. He finds that those who reject the battle are more deeply wounded than those who take part in it" (Wilde, 2010: 199).

Conclusions. "The Picture of Dorian Gray" by Oscar Wilde stands as a profound exploration of the intricate interplay between art, morality, and the manifestation of the uncanny. Through the novel's intricate narrative, Wilde challenges traditional Victorian Gothic tropes by presenting the portrait as a reflection of Dorian Gray's moral decay, rather than a supernat-

ural entity embodying the uncanny. The fusion of the novel's primary characters into a single entity mirrors the artist's role in bestowing the portrait with a soul, defying the natural order and ultimately paying the price with their lives.

The research deals with the concept of the uncanny valley, which the portrait enters as it exhibits its dynamic nature, altering perceptions across three stages, culminating in a grotesque, life-like form. Drawing parallels between Freud's notions of the uncanny and the novel's portrayal of death, corpses, and the doppelganger, the study underscores the theme of creator versus creation and the consequences of disrupting the natural order.

Wilde's masterpiece stands as a testament to the power of art to challenge societal norms and explore the depths of the human psyche. Through its compelling narrative and potent symbolism, "The Picture of Dorian Gray" continues to captivate readers, inviting them to confront the uncanny and contemplate the boundaries between art, morality, and the natural order of existence.

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