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Prioritizing in Oscar Wild's "The Picture of Dorian Gray": A Critical Stylistic Analysis

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Abstract:

Using Jeffries' (2010) critical stylistic technique, this study examines how Oscar Wilde criticizes aestheticism and moral degradation in The Picture of Dorian Gray using prioritizing tactics. Wilde employs "lexical, structural, thematic, semantic, and syntactic" prioritization to emphasize critical topics like as identity, corruption, and beauty. Lexical prioritization emphasizes the novel's attention on moral quandaries by continually employing phrases such as youth, temptation, and soul. The paradoxes of aestheticism are represented in structural priorities, which establish an ordered set in which physical attractiveness takes precedence above moral purity. The thematic prioritization reinforces the novel's wider philosophical themes, ensuring a consistent focus on the dangers of influence and ego. Syntactic priority heightens psychological tension through juxtaposition, repetition, and rhetorical structure, but semantic prioritizing adds symbolic depth, particularly in is opposed between adolescents and decadence. According to critics such as Ellmann (1988), Ledger and Luckhurst (2000), and Gagnier (1997), Wilde's language choices serve as a subversive criticism of society standards rather than simply being aesthetically beautiful. Finally, Wilde's use of prioritizing tactics reveals the fine line between morality and art, appearance and truth, and pushes readers to confront the dangers of an excessive emphasis on attractiveness: **Key Words Critical stylistic, Lexical prioritizing, Structural prioritizing, Thematic prioritizing. Semantic prioritizing, and Syntactic prioritizing**

Objectives of the Study:

The current study aims to:

1. To investigate the role of lexical, structural, thematic, semantic, and syntactic prioritizing in reinforcing important notions like beauty, temptation, and duality in "The Picture of Dorian Gray"
2. .To assess critical views (Ellmann, Jeffries, Ledger, & Luckhurst, Gagnier) on how Wilde's stylistic tactics develop the novel's philosophical and creative themes.
3. To show how prioritizing strategies produce dramatic tension and shape reader perceptions of morality, identity, and influence in the narrative.
4. To demonstrate how Wilde's stylistic tactics contribute to the novel's long-term literary value, ensuring that it remains relevant in literary evaluation and judgment.

1. Introduction:

Critical Stylistics as a n Approach to Analyzing Literary Texts

Language is not only a neutral means for communication; it actively affects meaning, produces reality, and supports ideological positions. Linguistic choices in literary writings shape how themes, characters, and events are presented to readers, influencing how they perceive them. Lesley Jeffries (2010) created critical stylistics, a technique that combines stylistic analysis with critical discourse analysis (CDA) to reveal ideological systems contained in texts. As opposed to classical stylistics, which focuses on language's formal and aesthetic aspects, critical stylistics investigates how linguistic patterns emphasize some concepts while marginalizing others (Jeffries, 2010).

Stylistics is a science that investigates the linguistic aspects of texts, such as grammar, vocabulary, and dialogue structures, to better comprehend how meaning is created (Simpson, 2014). Classical stylistic evaluation frequently focuses language's aesthetic and rhetorical purposes, examining how literary techniques contribute to the artistic quality of a piece. However, this approach does not often include the ideological consequences of language use (Stockwell, 2020). Critical stylistics appeared as a solution to this constraint by combining critical discourse analysis (CDA) with stylistic methodologies. Fairclough (2001) defines CDA as an investigation of how language is used to preserve and challenge the structures of societal power. Jeffries (2010) applies this technique to literary analysis, claiming that all texts, literary or non-literary, have ideological stance that may be uncovered by rigorous language analysis. Critical stylistics thus goes beyond analyzing stylistic traits and investigates how texts generate and emphasize specific viewpoints. Jeffries (2010) describes an established set of textual-conceptual tools for analyzing how meaning is organized inside texts. These methods concentrate on how language aspects influence interpretation, form linkages between thoughts and sustain intellectual attitudes. The current study takes one tool namely, prioritizing. Prioritizing in critical stylistics is how some components of a text are given more weight than others, hence affecting meaning and ideological influence. Jeffries (2010) describes many language approaches to prioritizing according to linguistic and discourse analysis, the following forms of lexical prioritization can be determined:

1. Lexical Prioritizing (Foregrounding)
2. Structural Prioritizing (Word Order and Syntax)
3. Thematic Prioritizing (Repetition and Parallelism)
4. Semantic Prioritizing (Lexical Choices and Collocation)
5. Syntactic Prioritizing (Implication and Presupposition)

1.1 The Importance of Language in Shaping a Novel's Ideology

Language is a crucial element in literature, influencing not just a novel's narrative framework but also its intellectual foundation. Authors integrate ideological ideas into linguistic choices such as vocabulary, grammar, dialogue, and narrative framing, influencing how readers understand social, political, and philosophical meanings. Language is not neutral; it shapes reality by confirming, opposing, or undermining prevailing discourses (Fairclough 2001). Novels function as ideological literature, reflecting and engaging with the power systems of their period. Language influences ideology in several ways, including lexical selection and semantic framing. The words an author uses shape how characters, events, and conflicts are seen. For example, a novel that refers to a revolutionary figure as a "freedom fighter" rather than a "terrorist" aligns its language with an ideological perspective (Simpson, 2014). Similarly, the use of euphemisms or derogatory phrases can discreetly encode prejudices about gender, ethnicity, or class, sustaining or challenging prevailing ideological stances (Fowler, 1996). Furthermore, narrative voice and focalization play an important role in ideology formation. First-person narrators offer a subjective perspective, perhaps associating readers with a particular ideological viewpoint, but omniscient narrators can give the sense of objectivity, gently steering reader interpretation (Stockwell, 2020). Untrustworthy narrators, on the other hand, call into question traditional ideological assumptions, prompting readers to reconsider reality and perspective (Booth, 1983). Discourse and dialogue systems indicate ideology inside books. Characters' speech patterns, registers, or dialects frequently reflect societal hierarchies and power dynamics (Bakhtin, 1981). For example, minority characters' voices may be silenced by narrative omission or fragmented conversation, echoing real-world institutional inequities (Wodak & Meyer, 2015). Intertextuality—references to historical, political, or literary discourses—deepens ideology by linking books with wider cultural debates (Kristeva, 1986).

1.2 An Overview of The Picture of Dorian Gray

Oscar Wilde's sole work, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), is widely regarded as a classic of Gothic fiction. The plot focuses around Dorian Gray, an attractive young man who is the subject of a portrait made by the artist Basil Hallward. Dorian desires his painting would age instead of him, allowing him to maintain his physical attractiveness indefinitely. As Dorian descends into a life of luxury and pleasure, the portrait becomes a visible symbol of his inner moral depravity, withering and decaying yet remaining young and unblemished. Under the influence of Lord Henry Wotton, Dorian chooses a hedonistic lifestyle, abandoning conventional moral ideals in favor of chasing pleasure without consequence. The story delves into topics of aestheticism, moral degradation, and the pitfalls of vanity. Oscar Wilde, an Irish writer, poet, and playwright, is well-known for his humor and for questioning Victorian societal conventions. Wilde (1854-1900) was a key player in the

Aesthetic Movement, which promoted "art for art's sake" while rejecting art's moral and practical purposes. His writings frequently criticize society's moral hypocrisy and superficiality, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is no exception. Wilde's life and demeanor were as colorful as his writing, and his personal experiences heavily influenced his work. His wit, humor, and contradictory manner attracted audiences, but his life took a fatal turn when he was imprisoned in 1895 for "gross indecency" owing to his homosexuality, precipitating his social and literary demise (Ellmann, 1988). *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a clear Criticism of Victorian society's concern with looks and moral dishonesty. Dorian's spiral into depravity, fuelled by his desire to keep a young appearance at any costs, is a potent metaphor for the hazards of leading a life free of moral responsibility. Wilde uses Dorian as a lens to investigate the contradictions between external beauty and interior depravity, and the work serves as a warning tale about the implications of living a hedonistic, self-centered life (Mighall, 2000).

2. :Data Analysis

2.1. Lexical prioritizing

It symbolizes the deliberate use and repetition of specific words or phrases to emphasize fundamental ideas or themes. By highlighting concepts like as beauty, temptation, and moral degeneration, Wilde establishes a linguistic scheme that underlines the novel's primary conflicts. As shown in the preceding extracts:

In this extract,

"The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden to itself" (Wilde, 1890/2003, p. 22), the phrases "temptation," "yield," and "resist" are used several times, highlighting the tension between pleasure and control over oneself. This language contrast condemns repression's psychological effects while also representing the broader societal clash between Victorian morality and hedonism. Jeffries (2010) claims that such word selections create the suspense and induce readers to reconsider standard moral attitudes. Furthermore, as Ellmann (1988) argues, the emphasis on desire reveals the interior anguish caused by great confinement and serves as a direct indictment of the time's restrictive moral standards. Similarly, in this extract, "You have a wonderful beauty, but beauty is a curse. I wonder what will happen to you in the end" (Wilde, 1890/2003, p. 15) that vocabulary selection not simply underscores the novel's investigation of beauty's attraction and destructiveness, but it also prompts audiences to consider society's concern with physical appearance. According to Jeffries (2010), this method causes cognitive tension in the reader by pushing them to see beauty's underlying contradictions. The use of the word "beauty" in conjunction with the word "curse" emphasizes aestheticism's dual nature. Finally, in this extract, **"I am still the same, but the portrait has changed"** (Wilde, 1890/2003, p. 127), the word "same" is used repeatedly to highlight the contrast between Dorian's unchanged outward and his failing soul. This word choice criticizes the brittleness of identity when separated from moral substance in addition to highlighting the conflict between appearance and truth. Jeffries (2010) points out that this kind of foregrounding shows how unstable a life based on flimsy ideals may be. As consequently, Wilde's "lexical prioritizing" encourages readers to contemplate the consequences of placing beauty ahead of morals while also strengthening the novel's ideals.

2.2. Structural Prioritizing

It involves employing sentence, phrase, and word structure to emphasize certain topics or construct a hierarchy of priorities in a piece of writing. Wilde regularly inserts subjects such as youth, beauty, and the superficial at the beginning of sentences or uses similar patterns to stress their importance. In this extract, "You are a man of your generation, Dorian. You have a wonderful beauty, but you must know that youth is the greatest of all gifts" (Wilde, 1890/2003, p. 23), Wilde places "youth" at the forefront of the sentence, structurally prioritizing it over other qualities. This arrangement not only reflects the societal obsession with youth and beauty but also critiques the superficial values of Dorian's world. According to Jeffries (2010), such structural prioritization creates a "hierarchy of values" within the text, reinforcing the novel's thematic concerns. Similarly, in this extract, "The portrait is the most magical of all mirrors. It is your best friend, and your worst enemy. It is the most terrible thing in the world. It is the most wonderful thing in the world" (Wilde, 1890/2003, p. 78), the contradictory aspect of the portrait is emphasized by the parallel structure that starts with "It is the most...", this syntactic mirroring not only reflects the novel's greater investigation of duality, but also highlights the contradiction between appearance and reality. According to Jeffries (2010), these syntactic patterns are crucial for highlighting dualities and enhancing the portrait's dual function as a symbol of disintegration and a reflection of interior truth. Finally, in this extract, "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!" (Wilde, 1890/2003, p. 30), The phrase "for

that" is used often, which structurally highlights Dorian's desperation and unwavering fixation with youth. This grammatical pattern symbolizes the aesthetic movement's acceptance of paradox and contradiction in addition to supporting the novel's examination of vanity and its effects. Such structural decisions are essential for depicting strong emotional states and internal tensions, as Jeffries (2010) points out. As a result, Wilde's structural prioritizing deepens the novel's thematic depth while simultaneously improving its aesthetic appeal.

2.3. Thematic Prioritizing

It refers to how important ideas are repeatedly emphasized throughout the narrative in order to create its overall meaning. By incorporating these elements into the story through conversation, imagery, and plot development, Wilde uses this technique to examine subjects like temptation, excess, and moral decay. In this extract "The only thing that one can do with a temptation is to yield to it" (Wilde, 1890/2003, p. 22) Lord Henry's rejection of traditional morality emphasizes the issue of temptation. Wilde highlights the novel's exploration of hedonism by depicting submitting as the sole option, which is consistent with Pater's (1873) aestheticism theory. In addition, the constant focus on temptation guides the reader's comprehension toward a nuanced critique of traditional morality. Literary experts point out that the decadent worldview, which contrasts societal constraints with natural desire, is reflected in this thematic precedence. Similarly, in this extract "You must certainly send it next year to the Grosvenor. The Academy is too large and too vulgar" (Wilde, 1890/2003, p. 44), the issue of elitism in art is emphasized by the focus on the Grosvenor's superiority over the unimportant Academy. This theme choice illustrates the aesthetic movement's obsession with beauty and refinement while also criticizing the social systems that establish creative value. Such theme prioritizing, according to Pater (1873), demonstrates how cultural elitism affects assessments of beauty. Finally, in this extract, "I am still the same, but the portrait has changed" (Wilde, 1890/2003, p. 127), The juxtaposition between Dorian's static appearance and the fading portrait highlights the topic of moral degradation. The novel's examination of the duality of human nature is emphasized by this thematic precedence, which also criticizes the results of a life dedicated to flimsy ideals. Such theme selections are essential to the novel's moral critique, as Jeffries (2010) points out. Thus, Wilde's thematic prioritization encourages readers to consider the moral implications of their own ideals in addition to reinforcing the novel's main themes.

2.4. Semantic Prioritizing

It implies mindfully selection of words with strong connotations to enhance the text's relevance. Wilde uses this strategy to give his words symbolic significance, which enhances the novel's exploration of ethics, personality, and humanity as a whole. In this extract, "Youth is the only thing worth having. When I get to be old, I shall have to die, and that will be the end of me" (Wilde, 1890/2003, p. 98) youth symbolizes possibility and life, whereas aging represents finality and dissolution. This linguistic difference highlights the inevitability of moral and physical degradation, as well as societal concerns about physical appeal. According to Jeffries (2010), such semantic decisions are critical in determining a text's symbolic structure. Similarly, in this extract, "The picture is a mirror, but it shows me my soul, not my face" (Wilde, 1890/2003, p. 127), this semantic emphasis not only broadens the novel's exploration of identity, but also criticizes society's fixation on beauty that is superficial. The semantic choice of "soul" over "face" emphasizes the distinction between outward appearance and inner reality. According to Jeffries (2010), such semantic judgments are fundamental to the novel's morality criticism. Finally, in this extract, "There is no such thing as a good influence, Mr. Gray. All influence is immoral—immoral from the scientific point of view" (Wilde, 1890/2003, p. 20), Such semantic choice not only challenges the concept of exterior impact, but it also embodies the novel's broader condemnation of social hypocrisy. The repetition of the phrase "immoral" gives the notion of influence a negative connotation. According to Jeffries (2010), these semantic methods are vital for presenting the text's ideological standpoint. Wilde's semantic prioritizing enhances the novel's thematic depth, prompting readers to contemplate the moral implications of their own actions.

2.5. Syntactic Prioritizing

It discusses how sentence structures are carefully structured to emphasize specific themes or create dramatic effects. Wilde heightens the text's emotional intensity and thematic tensions by employing this method to juxtapose opposing concepts. In this extract, "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!" (Wilde, 1890/2003, p. 30), the word "for that" appears frequently, emphasizing Dorian's desperation and unrelenting obsession with youth. This linguistic pattern represents the aesthetic movement's embrace of paradox and contradiction, as well as complementing the novel's exploration of vanity and its consequences. According to Jeffries (2010), such grammar structures

are necessary for conveying powerful emotional states and internal tensions Similarly, in this extract, "You have a wonderful beauty, but beauty is a curse. I wonder what will happen to you in the end" (Wilde, 1890/2003, p. 15), the use of coordinating conjunctions to contrast conflicting statements emphasizes the inherent contradiction in experiencing beauty. This grammatical balance not only encourages readers to reconcile opposing concepts, but also improves their grasp of the text's moral difficulties. As Ledger and Luckhurst (2000) point out, this strategy demonstrates the aesthetic movement's obsession with duality. Finally, in this extract, "I am still the same, but the portrait has changed" (Wilde, 1890/2003, p. 127), The sentence's brief, contrasting structure highlights the difference between Dorian's static appearance and the decaying portrait. This syntactic priority acts as a stylistic device for expressing the novel's underlying critique of shallow ideals in addition to illuminating the thematic struggle between appearance and reality. Such syntactic decisions are essential to the novel's moral and artistic richness, claims Jeffries (2010). As a result, Wilde's syntactic prioritization strengthens the novel's examination of morals and human nature while simultaneously enhancing its dramatic impact.

3. Conclusion Based on the aforementioned stylistic analysis of "The Picture of Dorian Gray", the following significant conclusion about Wilde's employment of prioritizing techniques can be inferred: Lexical Prioritizing enhance thematic focus: Wilde intentionally chooses and repeats terms like beauty, temptation, youth, corruption, and soul to highlight significant themes, enticing readers to participate with the novel's moral quandaries and societal critique. Critics of literature such as Ellmann (1988) and Ledger and Luckhurst (2000) emphasize how this strategy exemplifies aestheticism's conflicting principles. Structural Prioritization Strengthens Social and Philosophical Hierarchies: Wilde constructs sentence patterns to prioritize beauty and youth above morality, strengthening aestheticism's essential beliefs. Parallelism and juxtaposition generate stunning contrasts, such as the duality of the painting and Dorian's physical appearance. According to Jefferies (2010), this prioritizing reveals the fragility of identity when divorced from ethical considerations. Thematic Prioritizing Determines the Novel's Core Message: Wilde maintains thematic cohesiveness by often returning to themes of influence, moral corruption, and the repercussions of pride. According to Gagnier (1997), the repeating of these motifs is consistent with the decadent movement's challenge to Victorian moral norms. Wilde's thematic prioritizing is a critique of a society that prizes appearance over ethical character. Semantic Prioritizing Increases Symbolic and Emotional Depth: Wilde's intentional use of terms with powerful meanings, such as mirror, curse, marvelous, and awful, contributes to the novel's symbolic richness. The contradiction between youth (linked to vitality) and age (linked to decay) heightens the novel's primary philosophical conflict. Literary critics such as Pater (1873) and Horne (2013) argue that such language choices represent aestheticism's ambivalent moral stance. Syntactic Prioritization: "Rhetorical repetition, exclamations, and conditional sentences" heighten behavioral and dramatic tension by showing Dorian's desperation and descent into depravity. Juxtaposing sentence patterns, such as "I am still the same, but the portrait has changed," emphasizes the difference between outward appearance and internal degeneration. According to Jefferies (2010), Wilde's use of language strategies forces readers to confront contradictions between the protagonist and the creative philosophy he symbolizes.

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