

PENGUIN CLASSICS



OSCAR WILDE

THE PICTURE OF  
DORIAN GRAY



企鵝丛书  
道林·格雷的肖像画  
奥斯卡·王尔德 著

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## **The Picture of Dorian Gray**

### **道林·格雷的肖像画**

这篇带有神秘色彩的小说，描述一位花花公子以美貌和风度吸引玩弄年轻姑娘。他神奇地保持着外表的常青，而他的肖像却因他的恶行而变得丑陋不堪，最后他在极度矛盾的心情下与肖像同归于尽。

作者奥斯卡·王尔德 1854 年生于英国都柏林，毕业于牛津大学，推崇唯美主义。1881 年出版第一本诗集，1882 年去美国讲学，1891 年出版《道林·格雷的肖像画》。本书出版后引起英国上流社会的抨击，因为道林·格雷的形像揭示了英国上流社会的伪善面目，但本书最终成为世界名著之一，反映了王尔德非凡的文学修养和他的美学观点。

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PENGUIN



CLASSICS

## THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

In 1854 Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde was born in Dublin, the son of an eminent surgeon. He went to Trinity College, Dublin, and then to Magdalen College, Oxford, where, in the last years of the seventies, he started the cult of 'Aestheticism', of making an art of life. His first book, *Poems*, was published in 1881, and in 1882 he went to lecture in America. After his marriage to Constance Lloyd in 1884 he published several books of stories for children. Then followed *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891).

Wilde's first success on the stage was when George Alexander produced *Lady Windermere's Fan* in 1892. This was followed by Tree's production of *A Woman of No Importance* in the next year, and in 1895 by *An Ideal Husband* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* running at the same time. *Salomé* was refused a licence in England but was published in France in 1893.

In 1895 Wilde brought a libel action against the Marquess of Queensberry: he lost the case and was himself sentenced to two years' imprisonment with hard labour. As a result of this experience he wrote *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. He was released from prison, bankrupt, in 1897 and went to Paris, where he lived until his death in 1900.

Peter Ackroyd was born in London in 1949 and was educated at Cambridge and Yale Universities. He was literary editor of the *Spectator* for some years and is now chief book reviewer for *The Times*. He has published three books of poetry and is the author of *The Great Fire of London*, *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde*, winner of the Somerset Maugham Prize for 1984, *Hawksmoor*, winner of the Whitbread Award and Guardian Fiction Prize for 1985, and *Chatterton*, his latest novel. His non-fiction work includes *Ezra Pound and his World* and a biography of T.S. Eliot which won the Whitbread and the Heinemann Award for 1984.

THE PICTURE OF  
DORIAN GRAY

by  
OSCAR WILDE

*Edited by Peter Ackroyd*

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## INTRODUCTION

The composition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was determined, like so many of the events in Oscar Wilde's life, by chance: Wilde and Arthur Conan Doyle were dining with an American publisher, J. M. Stoddart, and during the course of this dinner Stoddart commissioned both of them to write for *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*. Conan Doyle has taken up the story:

Wilde's contribution was *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a book which is surely upon a high moral plane, while I wrote *The Sign of Four*.

As soon as he received the commission Wilde wrote swiftly – the sad history of Dorian Gray was no doubt one he carried in his head – and the story appeared in the July 1890 issue of *Lippincott's*.

Although Conan Doyle may have considered *Dorian Gray* to be a 'high moral plane', his opinion was not shared by the first reviewers who condemned the work for its speculative treatment of immoral or at least uncomfortable subjects. Charles Whibley, in the *Scots Observer*, declared that 'Mr Oscar Wilde has again been writing stuff that were better unwritten' (the 'again' refers to Wilde's earlier essay on Shakespeare's admiration for a boy actor, *The Portrait of Mr W. H.*); and he went on, '... he can write for none but outlawed noblemen and perverted telegraph boys'. This was an unambiguous reference to a homosexual scandal of 1889, which had compromised both Lord Arthur Somerset and a number of Post Office employees who frequented a male brothel in Cleveland Street.

Wilde made a spirited reply to this and to other damaging attacks, and in the month of its publication declared to an acquaintance that the story would be '... ultimately recognized

as a real work of art with a strong ethical lesson inherent in it'. To Conan Doyle himself he wrote, 'I cannot understand how they can treat *Dorian Gray* as immoral.' That may be so, but there can be no doubt that the public controversy unnerved Wilde: book publication was planned for the following year, and he took care not only to add chapters which are of a more conventional Victorian nature (specifically the sub-plot concerning the putative revenge of James Vane upon Dorian Gray) but also to give a less 'purple' tone to those passages which might be described as homo-erotic in spirit. It is possible that he had written the first version too quickly, or with the thoughtlessness of inspiration, and did not realize that it was as self-revealing as it now seemed to be; but, despite the changes he made, the publication of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* marked the first stage in Wilde's long descent into open scandal and eventual infamy.

The point was that *Dorian Gray* presented in oblique form an image of the double life which Wilde himself was leading at this time, and there are some critics who believe the book to represent Wilde's need for confession if not expiation. His adolescence had been in certain respects a conventional one, but his years after Oxford were marked by his pose as an Aesthete. Then in the spring of 1884 (in his twenty-ninth year) he married Constance Lloyd; their first child, Cyril, was born a year later. It seems at first to have been a happy marriage, despite the sharp remarks about matrimony made in this novel, and Wilde retired into an obscurity only alleviated by his brief editorship of *Woman's World*. But in 1886 he met a young man, Robert Ross, who became something more than a disciple: it is from this date that Wilde began to engage in homosexual practices and to become part of a 'Uranian' circle in London. So by the time *Dorian Gray* was published in Lippincott's, there had already been rumours about his behaviour, and the taint of a

clandestine life meant that there were occasions when he was snubbed in public places – this is, of course, the life to which Dorian Gray is forced to become accustomed in the novel, and there is no doubt that Wilde is drawing directly upon his own experiences in order to furnish that atmosphere of scandal which fills its last chapters.

But there were certain other parallels with Wilde's own life which made the book's reception peculiarly important to him. When he was at Oxford he became a close friend of Frank Miles, a painter, and through Miles he met the homosexual aesthete Lord Ronald Gower. It seems possible that both Miles and Gower are represented in *Dorian Gray* by Basil Hallward and Lord Henry Wotton, just as the philosophies of Pater and of Ruskin (whom Wilde had also met at Oxford) animate the more theoretical disquisitions in the novel. There is much here, also, that might act as an emblem of Wilde's own emotional life – not just in the note of mystery and secrecy which is struck at the beginning, but in the mood of ennui and even despair which envelops the narrative at the close. That Wilde himself was prey to such feelings is not in doubt; in his correspondence there is a sense of world-weariness and personal failure (of being 'burned out', as he claimed in 1880), and of his belief that he was walking upon an artificial stage. This novel is more than a veiled account of Wilde's sexual predilections, it is also an exploration of that *accidie* which afflicted him in his private moments.

Oscar Wilde was also an intensely superstitious man – although it cannot be said that his numerous visits to palmists and to fortune-tellers materially assisted him – and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is from the beginning invaded by the idea of fatality and doom. The tone is introduced very early, in some of Basil Hallward's first words to Lord Henry Wotton: '... we shall all suffer for what the gods have given us, suffer terribly'.

And it was when Wilde himself was suffering in just such a manner, while locked up in a cell within the confines of Reading gaol, that he returned to this theme and meditated upon its annunciation in the novel which he had composed only seven years before his great fall: 'Doom,' he wrote in the famous prison letter that was later to be called *De Profundis*, 'that like a purple thread runs through the gold cloth of *Dorian Gray*.' In the novel itself there are strange anticipations of Wilde's own eventual fate.

Here, one should never make one's *début* with a scandal. One should reserve that to give an interest to one's old age.

Shades of the Marquess of Queensberry appear in a further sentence, which Wilde also remembered in his prison cell:

I say, in *Dorian Gray* somewhere, that 'a man cannot be too careful in the choice of his enemies' . . .

And it might be pointed out that, on their second meeting in July 1891, Wilde gave a copy of this book to Lord Alfred Douglas, the young man who in so many ways is prefigured in the character of Dorian Gray and who would be the catalyst of Wilde's ill fortune. Never has a novel been surrounded by so many portents.

And never has a novel so marked out its author. Before its publication Wilde was perhaps best known for his fairy stories – *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* had been published in 1888 – and for his contributions to aesthetic criticism – *The Decay of Lying* was published in 1889. Of course his youthful pose as an aesthete had earned him a temporary notoriety but after *Dorian Gray* everything changed and, as Phillippe Julian has remarked, ' . . . the name of Wilde became a synonym for all that was most unhealthy'. There was one sense in which this was inevitable for, by introducing the painted portrait of Dorian Gray as an emblem of sin, he was also putting his finger on a

peculiar Victorian complex which was associated with the idea of sexual guilt: as Owen Burdett has suggested, in the late nineteenth century 'art and scandal came to be associated, and the imaginative life began to take vice for its province'.

It was not just a question of 'scandal', however, since in this novel Wilde had effectively challenged English society on a number of levels; he continually characterizes it, for example, as the haven of the hypocrite or the dissembler: 'My dear fellow,' Dorian Gray observes to Basil Hallward, 'you forget that we are in the native land of the hypocrite.' English readers were not accustomed to such a forceful characterization of their civilization, and Wilde went even further than this; he mocked both the artistic pretensions and the social morality of the English, and some of the most powerful passages in the novel disclose the grinding poverty and hopelessness against which 'Society' turned its face. Wilde, an Irishman, was putting a mirror up to his oppressors – and their shocked reactions would eventually encircle him when he stood in the dock at the Old Bailey.

It would be wrong to suggest, however, that the contemporary reaction was entirely one of horror or of outrage: W. B. Yeats described it as a 'wonderful book' and Walter Pater characterized it as 'really alive'; and it can fairly be said that those who were not fatally compromised by the Victorian ethic found much in *Dorian Gray* to admire and to praise. It is significant, in this context, that the reviews in America were much more favourable. Wilde himself was not slow to emphasize its merits and, after the first shock of scandal had passed, he was always at pains to defend his novel. He speaks of it in the fondest terms in *De Profundis* and, after his release from custody, he wrote to one publisher, 'I only know that *Dorian Gray* is a classic, and deservedly.'

Like any classic, of course, it is established upon other

classics, although it would be difficult to offer more than a tentative provenance for it. Several sources for *Dorian Gray* have been identified, among them Huysmans's *A Rebours*, Balzac's *La Peau de Chagrin*, Gautier's *Mademoiselle du Maupin* and Pater's *Gaston de Latour*. Echoes of these books are no doubt present (and Wilde was not one to shrink from open plagiarism, even plagiarism of himself, when the occasion warranted) and it is also true, as Wilde once noted, that the strange book which 'poisons' *Dorian Gray* is meant to be an extrapolation from *A Rebours*: 'It is', he told one correspondent, 'a fantastic variation on Huysmans's over-realistic study of the artistic temperament in our inartistic age.' But it would be rash to assert Wilde's resemblance to other writers, or his debt to other books, in too deterministic a manner. As he said in an interview in 1895:

Setting aside the prose and poetry of the Greek and Latin authors, the only writers who have influenced me are Keats, Flaubert, and Walter Pater; and before I came across them I had already gone more than half-way to meet them.

It will be noted that two out of the three authors mentioned here are English, and so it was perhaps slightly over-enthusiastic of Arthur Ransome to assert of *Dorian Gray* that it is 'the first French novel to be written in the English language'.

Certainly its emphasis upon strange sins, and its somewhat uninventive borrowings from Huysmans in such matters as the symbolism of jewels, give it a French demeanour; but the book's wit is Irish and its melodrama is English. There was always a streak of vulgarity in Wilde's imagination (like summer lightning, it appears at the most unexpected moments), and he was rarely able to refrain from taking a readily available convention to excessive lengths: as a story of passion, *Dorian Gray* is closer to the work of Hall Caine than of Flaubert, and in

the morbid sonorities of its prose there is more than a hint of Victorian pathos. The characters of Sybil and James Vane, for example, might have been derived from the kind of play which Wilde himself was prone to mock; they might even have stepped from the one example mentioned in the novel itself: '*The Idiot Boy or Dumb but Innocent*. Our fathers used to like that sort of piece, I believe.' It is a mark of Wilde's most complicated temperament that he was able to parody the faults from which he himself was not immune – magniloquence of a sentimental kind being one of them.

But that is not the sum of his achievement in this book and, in a work which is striated with images of duality and the double life, it is not surprising that *Dorian Gray* should be composed in two distinct tones – one being that of sentimental tragedy, the other of outrageous epigram. This is of course a 'distinctive feature of Wilde's work – in his earliest drama, *Vera*, the epigrams are given to the aristocrats and the melodrama is lavished upon the revolutionaries – but it reaches its most elaborate form here. *Dorian Gray* in fact stands at the pivotal point of Wilde's writing: both the aesthetic discussions and the theatrical plot look back to his earlier essays and stories, while the flourishes of epigrammatic wit (most notably in the sections he wrote later, for the volume edition) anticipate the plays for which he will always be remembered. It is no accident that he should have begun work on the first of these dramas, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, at the time he was completing his revision of *Dorian Gray*. And it could be said that, just as the novel's publication marked the onset of Wilde's fatal reputation, it also gave him the self-confidence (as well as the style) with which to start the composition of his major works.

But *Dorian Gray* is filled with more troubled intimations and it is the oscillation between epigram and tragedy, between the celebration of individualism and the assertion of doom, that

properly characterizes the book. In the conversations of Lord Henry Wotton and the behaviour of Dorian Gray there is clearly a sense in which Wilde is continuing to celebrate the triumphs of a truly individual life and to suggest that, in the perfection of personality, self-expression can be turned into an art. And yet this world of self-assertion and self-development is one that is seen to fall apart. For beneath the brilliant surface of Wilde's prose there is the mordant gaze of the moralist, and it would not be too much to say that on occasions there was a congenital Puritan lurking behind his mask of the Aesthete or the Dandy. He loved that bright world which he created, but he also allows it to be destroyed with Dorian Gray's cry, 'so horrible in its agony'. In his own life he saw through his 'pose' and even courted his eventual destruction; in his fiction, he raised a world in his own image and then condemned it for its emptiness and its follies.

In that sense Wilde represents in plangent form the most abiding preoccupations of his period – at the end of a century, it was a time of sadness and sterility when the most acute talents understood that a world, and a world of values, was coming to an end. They mocked it as it died or, like George Gissing, produced threnodies on its behalf, but they could find nothing to put in its place. That is one reason for the emptiness and despair at the heart of *Dorian Gray*, and on one level we may read this book as an epitaph for Victorian civilization.

Yet it would be wrong to attach too long a moral to this tale since, as Wilde himself says here,

. . . the only things that one can use in fiction are the things that one has ceased to use in fact.

This is one aspect of his aesthetic bravado but it is true in the sense that Wilde is on this occasion a novelist rather than a philosopher or even a cultural historian, and it is as a novel that



*Dorian Gray* must finally be judged. As such, it is a considerable success; it may be melodramatic in inspiration but it is a triumph of execution. Wilde knew how to end one chapter with thunder and begin the next with trumpets; he knew how to orchestrate the emotions of a scene and, in that sequence where Sybil Vane loses her powers as an artist as soon as she has found love, he demonstrates an evocative sympathy which is not always present in his later dramas. And if *Dorian Gray* is one of the best narrations of the 'double life' of a Victorian gentleman, so it is also one of the best accounts of the divisions within London itself. As the narrative moves from the dining tables of the rich to the hovels of Whitechapel or Limehouse, Wilde's descriptive powers lift the book far above the casual sonorities of his conventional prose; and as we marvel at this, we can see also the burgeoning comedy of Wilde's dialogue in those scenes where Lord Henry Wotton appears.

One might say of this novel, then, what Wilde says of Society in its pages:

Form is absolutely essential to it. It should have the dignity of a ceremony, as well as its unreality, and should combine the insincere character of a romantic play with the wit and beauty that make such plays delightful to us.

Here Wilde plays with paradox, which is fitting in a novel that is iridescent with paradox and with the sensibility that is mediated through wit and effortless display. Only shallow people refuse to judge by appearances, to paraphrase our author, which is perhaps why *The Picture of Dorian Gray* has largely escaped the attentions of the more sombre critics and why its popularity has endured for almost one hundred years.

PETER ACKROYD  
*London, 1985*